
HORIZON: ZERO DAWN BEST PS4 EXCLUSIVE?
PLAY
ISSUE 279
300 PS4 & VITA GAMES RATED
GHOST RECON
WILDLANDS
THE FINAL VERDICT ON UBISOFT'S RETURN TO ACTIVE SERVICE

PS4 PS VR PS3 VITA PSN

Welcome PLAY

A closer look at all of the best games on the horizon



34 RISE OF THE ROBOTS

Does *Horizon: Zero Dawn* have what it takes to survive?

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SWITCHING IT UP



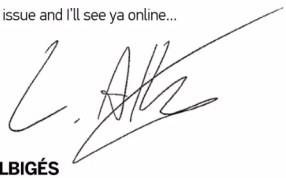
YOU MAY HAVE noticed, but another player just joined the game. It's one that should be familiar to everyone, going by the name of Nintendo. While Switch can't really be seen as a direct competitor to the current top-end consoles on account of its lower specs and hybrid model, there's no denying that its going to eat into the time and finances of those who like to keep abreast of everything that goes on in the world of gaming. And the problem right now – for me, at least, but I'm sure I'm not alone – is that both time and money are already stretched thin without even putting down my DualShock 4.

Resident Evil 7, *For Honor*, *Yakuza 0* and *Nioh* all turning out to be excellent in the space of a month has been bad enough for my wallet and sleep pattern, but the worrying thing is that it's only going to get worse. *Horizon* just rocked up and it's *outstanding*. I doff my cap to the technical wizards at Guerrilla for creating the best showcase so far for the power of the PS4 Pro, and for making sure regular PS4 owners got something truly special as well. And now, the floodgates are well and truly open.

Nier: Automata. Mass Effect: Andromeda. Outlast 2. Crash: N. Sane Trilogy, Persona 5. Injustice 2. Prey. Tekken 7. FFXIV: Stormblood. Yooka-Laylee. That'd be considered a pretty good slate for an entire year, but no – 2017 has gone absolutely ham and all that is due out before the summer. It's nuts, and I have no idea how best to make use of the limited time and money I have.

So in that respect, I guess I ought to be thanking Nintendo. With a better launch lineup, I'd have been all over Switch day one. But instead, I'll have time to work my way through that insane list up there before I pick one later in the year for *Zelda* and *Mario*. It's got to be done. Just, y'know... not right now.

Enjoy the issue and I'll see ya online...



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CURRENTLY PLAYING
Horizon: Zero Dawn

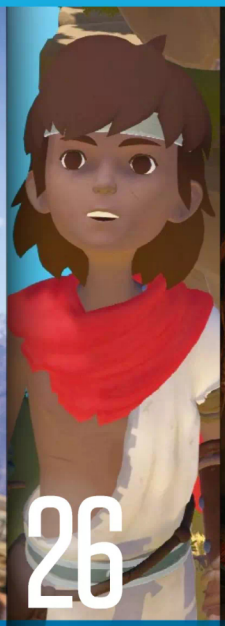
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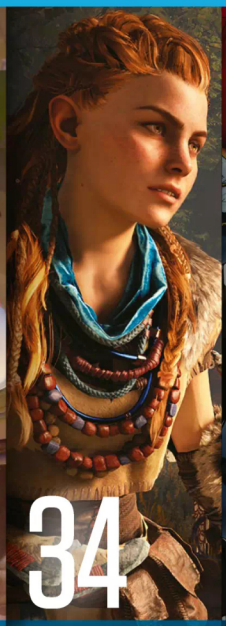
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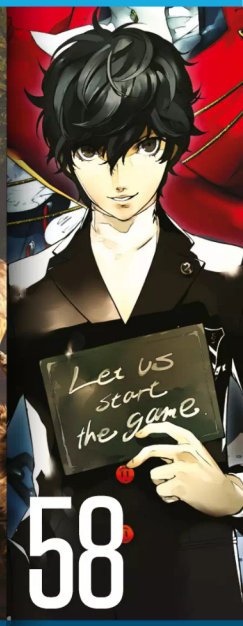
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DANGER CLOSE

FINAL VERDICT

IS **GHOST RECON: WILDLANDS** FIT FOR SERVICE?

Rhythmic, now that's the word to describe it; the devilish hum of rotary blades slicing through a still Bolivian sky. We're soaring high above the beautiful Altiplano of South America, instructed to investigate the Montuyuc region and any connection it may have to the Santa Blanca drug cartel. Intel is light, though Karen Bowman (our dour CIA-appointed case handler) indicates that El Muro – recently named Head Of Security by cartel king El Sueño – has taken control of the region by force; the civilians forced to add oppression to a laundry list of grievances that already includes exploitation, poverty and living in a state of perpetual fear.

The cartel is using the harsh salt flatlands and surrounding mountain plateau as a training ground for an army – a hit squad trained by traitors to the United States military – in an effort to further protect the traffic of cocaine travelling out of the country and across the border into Mexico. This kind of operation should take weeks to plan but we have just minutes to pull it together.

Montuyuc is, after all, just one of the 21 different regions we need to restore peace to, and this just one of over a hundred missions on the docket. El Muro is just one of the 26 bosses protecting El Sueño and it's down to just the four of us to get the job done, in any way that we see fit. We are Ghosts caught in an otherworldly hellscape of fire and ice, of wind and rain, and nothing will stop us from succeeding. Except, perhaps, Ghost 4. He is currently racing across the Laguna Colorada in a 4x4 while we attempt to prepare for an aerial assault on a military complex; his banal chatter across the shared communication line is deafening. It's difficult to find good help these days.



FILLING IN THE BLANKS

If we're being completely honest, what came next was a little surprising. No, not the contents of *Ghost Recon: Wildlands* – the latest attempt by Ubisoft to chip away at the dated constructs of open-world game design – but because we were sat down opposite the game's narrative director. Although that isn't surprising in and of itself, you will hopefully better understand our confusion once you consider the wider ambitions at the heart of the *Wildlands* experience.

It isn't that *Wildlands* doesn't have a story to tell *per se*, it just isn't being written or delivered in the conventional sense. Ubisoft is utilising its sprawling sandbox – the largest open world it has ever created – to allow players to construct a narrative for themselves. That's a lot of faith to put on the shoulders of players, especially those who are simply looking to enjoy shooting faceless cocaine peddlers in this light take on the tactical shooter genre.

Wildlands has all of the familiar Ubisoft quirks of course; all of the poorly scripted characters you've come to expect, cutscenes that occasionally push the story forward at irregular intervals and a map filled with a maddening number of items to check off the completion list. But the familiarity stops there. The presentation and execution of *Wildlands* is wildly different to anything that has come before it; the pieces of the narrative puzzle are all on the table but the way in which you assemble them isn't predetermined. Whether you end up with the full picture or a jumbled mess is dependent on your expectations, intentions and decisions throughout the game.

"From the very beginning we knew we wanted you to be able to jump back and forth between solo, private and public co-op for

the whole thing, for every mission in the game," Sam Strachman begins to tell us, citing the huge challenge that faced developer Ubisoft Paris as it embarked on its first *Tom Clancy* project since 2012's divisive *Ghost Recon: Future Soldier*. "In order to build narration around that, we needed to open up everything as much as possible.

"One of our big pillars of design from the very beginning was the idea of freedom of choice. What's interesting about all of our missions is what we call the '360 approach to design'. We give you the objective and then how you do it is totally up to you. It's as simple as that: here is the objective, now go and do it."

It's true, that freedom of choice is the backbone to the entire experience of *Wildlands*. Everything from the flow of the story to your play style, from whom you want to play with to which missions you choose to tackle, it is all adaptable – able to bend to your will. *Wildlands* is eager to please in this respect, though those that crave structure may find themselves out of their depth. *Wildlands* is a game where wild creativity is rewarded, though entirely reliant on communication and control, while coasting through (even if accidentally) is seemingly punished with an experience that lacks variation or excitement.

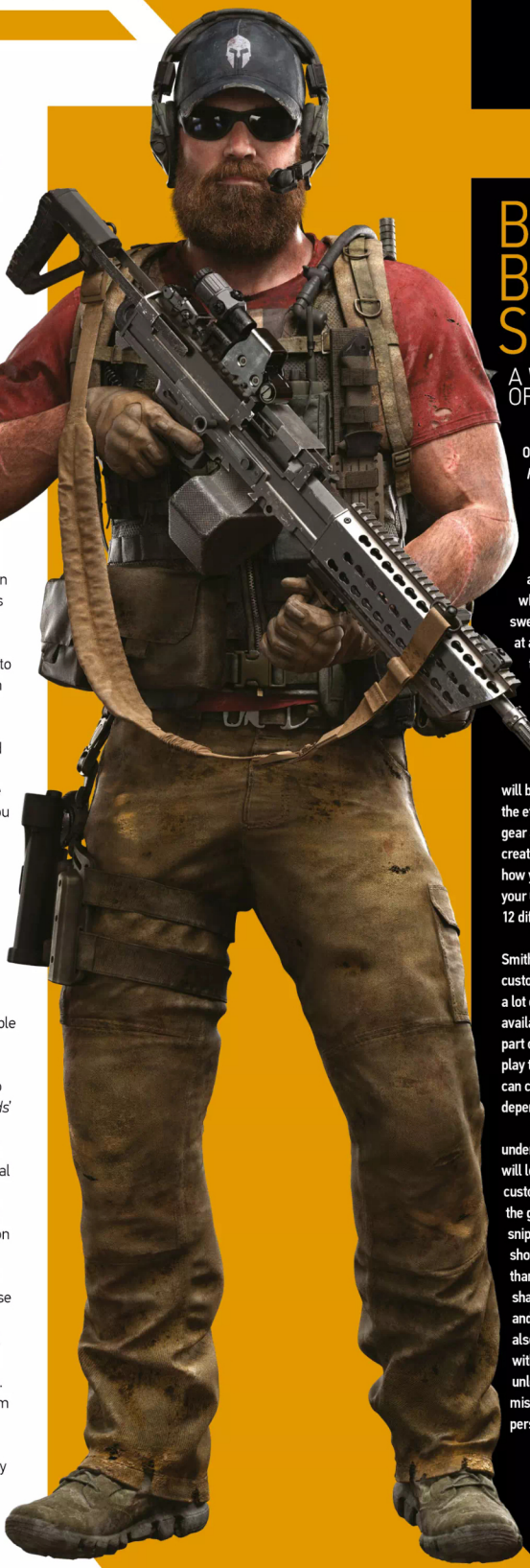
Following a short introductory mission, *Wildlands* is essentially open. Over 100 story missions populate a map split into 21 distinct regions, with difficulty scaling and spiking across each depending on the strength of particular cartel operations – split between Production, Smuggling, Security and Influence. Each mission can be tackled in any order from the outset and replayed immediately, in either solo (joined by three AI teammates) or co-operatively in private or public matchmaking (with up to three other players), with seamless character progression following you between all configurations.

"We give you the objective, we give you all the toys in this sandbox, and then you play how you want," says Strachman. "It really is about creative decision making. There are so many variables and variations in that depending on what weapons you are using, how you have your drone equipped, what terrain you are on, and how many people you are playing with. There are just so many factors that change that experience with each mission. We just wanted to be as open as possible."

The problem here, ultimately, is that it is essentially impossible to build a cohesive narrative or paced adventure around such a free-flowing structure. The traditional three-act plot structure has been completely abandoned in an attempt to allow players to jump in and out of co-op without restriction, and to keep *Wildlands*' co-operative ambitions alive.

Every action builds towards a climactic encounter with one of the main bosses, while random world events and assisting the local rebels can be used to increase your resource pool. Every action is, in effect, a self-contained story, though they are propelled forward by petulant NPC dialogue and simple (largely uninteresting) mission parameters. Ubisoft is intent, then, to let players create their own stories and forge their own personal anecdotes while adventuring across the 11 gorgeous biomes – from snowy mountains and dense jungles, to harsh salt flats and imposing canyons. At times this works, at other times it can make the game feel at odds with itself.

With *Wildlands* being so open-ended, it ultimately means that there is very little to drive you forward outside of personal intuition. So much of the experience is to be shaped by your own hand – from your approach to each of the missions to your choice of weapon loadouts and appearance – that it can be all too easy to become content. Shifting infiltration strategies and insertion points on the fly



BUILD A BETTER SOLDIER

A WILD AMOUNT OF CUSTOMISATION

One of the pillars of *Ghost Recon: Wildlands*' design is centred on customisation and flexibility. This shines through most successfully in the game's Character Smith and Gun Smith systems, in which you are able to make sweeping changes to your Ghost at almost any time to help tailor *Wildlands* to your own personal experience.

"You will be able to craft your own Ghost to your image. In the Character Smith you will be able to choose the gender, the ethnicity, how they look, their gear and their clothes," notes creative director Eric Couzian on how you are able to customise your Ghost from the start across 12 different elements.

"We [also] have the Gun Smith where you'll be able to customise your weapon. We have a lot of combinations that are available, you can change every part of the weapon and, as you play the way that you want, you can customise your weapons depending on your own play style.

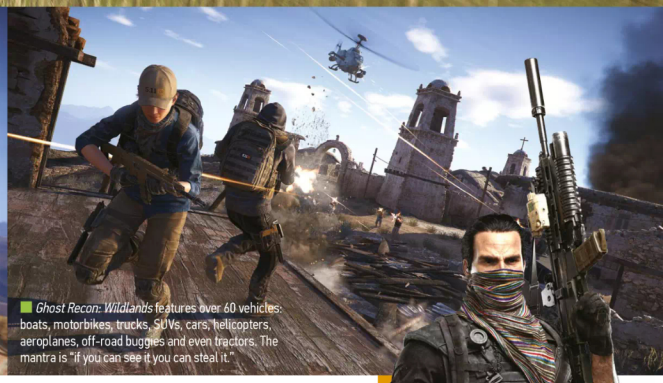
That's something of an understatement. Gun Smith will let you tinker with over 50 customisable weapons throughout the game – from assault and sniper rifles, to LMGs, pistols, shotguns and SMGs – with more than 100 attachments in the shape of scopes, stocks, barrels and magazines. These can then also be customised further with skins, many of which are unlocked by completing certain missions, to bring even more personality to co-op sessions.

> We wanted to take *Ghost Recon* to a new level
>
> **Eric Couzian, creative director**





Wildlands is the largest, most responsive open world Ubisoft has ever created, with 21 different regions coming together to create a fictionalised Bolivia that has one foot in reality.



Ghost Recon: Wildlands features over 60 vehicles: boats, motorbikes, trucks, SUVs, cars, helicopters, aeroplanes, off-road buggies and even tractors. The mantra is "if you can see it you can steal it."

is all well and good, but – much like in *Far Cry 4* and *Just Cause 3* – *Wildlands* can risk becoming bland in spite of its freedom.

This is a game that requires active thought and consideration at all times, demands it even, and those that lack the creativity or the drive to explore new methods of play may find the lack of a set narrative to be less engaging than the solution Ubisoft Paris desperately wants you to find. Then again, those that love to create chaos with friends for the purpose of Twitch streams and YouTube montages may just fall in love with the uninhibited carnage that you're able to dutifully command.

BACK IN ACTION

The plan of attack: to tackle the Full Load mission quickly and efficiently. We were to move in perfect sync, the pull of our triggers to be thunderously rhythmic. Four mortar shell crates needed to be destroyed, but Ghost 1's quick deployment of a drone revealed a base crawling with enemy soldiers. Armoured vehicles and turret emplacements guarded the obvious entry points while watchtowers overlooked the surrounding flatland – Ghost 4 was nowhere to be seen.

We worked as a tight unit; the plan was to take position in a watch tower, using it to provide cover as a two-man team worked through the camp stealthily, it took just seconds to adjust our loadouts to silencers and sniper rifles and not much longer to gain the advantage we so desperately craved. The crack and eventual whip of a well-aimed rifle bolt could be heard echoing through the encampment as we moved forward; enemies were dropping slowly, purposefully. Ghosts 2 and 3 moved with silent authority, tagging approaching groups of enemies from the cover of foliage and executing them dutifully in tandem while peering down the iron sights, a visual cue indicating the other was weapons ready and in a position to fire.

Snaking through the complex, detection and a battle for which we were not equipped to win, was avoided. But then we heard it. The booming, deafening explosion of a rocket-propelled grenade striking the rotor of an enemy helicopter – Ghost 4 re-emerged and within seconds everything went to Hell. Like every mission we've participated in thus far in Bolivia, encounters may start stealthily but they always seem to end in a shoot-out.

Even the best laid plans can unravel through just a second of spontaneity. Readjusting to the rhythm of combat is easy enough, »





> We give you the objective, we give you all the toys in this sandbox, and then you play how you want
>
> **Sam Strachman, narrative director**

but it's here where any tactical ambitions are quickly replaced with hectic shoot-outs, more *Call Of Duty* than *Tom Clancy.* Then again, that's just the risk you run fighting alongside soldiers you don't know – not that going solo would likely have gone any more successfully.

CASTLES IN THE SAND

From a legacy perspective, taking *Ghost Recon* into an open-world environment actually makes a lot of sense. The franchise's debut earned itself a faithful audience back in 2001 by mixing tactical military action with large open environments, all of it wrapped around a wickedly high difficulty level. What makes less sense is Ubisoft Paris' devotion to building a seamless transition between single-player and co-operative sessions – in effect you lose the difficulty, while the tactical military action is only possible if you go out of your way to build that experience for yourself and enforce it on others around you. It creates a dichotomy between experience and execution, and you can hear the genesis of it in the way the team speaks about the game.

"We wanted to take *Ghost Recon* to a new level. If you remember the very first *Ghost Recon*, getting this franchise into an open world was quite an obvious choice," says creative director Eric Couzian. "But it was not just another open world that we wanted, we also wanted to give total freedom of choice. What I mean by total freedom of choice is that you can play the way you want, depending on your own play style."

There are two ideas here, and they aren't playing nicely. Effectively, with such little reliance on narrative, set-pieces and scripted events to drive play forward, Ubisoft is hoping that players will get lost in the fun of the sandbox it has created. The idea of "total freedom of choice" essentially equates to 'undirected play'; in this wild sandbox Ubisoft has created, the experience is supposed to be pure, *freeing.* Players should find fun in the fact that things like narration, map progression or item procurement no longer inhibit the action.

It's true that Ubisoft Paris has built an incredibly tight, solid shooter – one that allows for seamless switching between third- and first-person combat. It has a deep and customisable engine built for reactive play and a technically impressive drop-in/drop-out co-op system, built inside a systemic and responsive open world. But it still feels as if it is missing a critical element of play. What the studio has seemingly failed to do is put as much innovation and depth into the mission design, narrative structure and writing, as they have into their basic mechanics.

Just because a player has stepped into a sandbox doesn't necessarily mean that they are going to build castles within it. The idea of leveraging player imagination is ambitious in and of itself, but it is also risky. Strachman is eager to assert that by "creating all of the tools and all of the toys" the player should have enough to get the intended experience out of *Wildlands.* If you're with a good group for co-op, the potential for this system does come to the fore and the anecdotal stories created throughout play can be fun, as too is the retelling of them.

"Here are all the toys, now go play; for us that's a really important design principle," he says. "Do you want to load up a helicopter with C4 and throw it into the middle of a camp, blowing everything up? Or do you want to wait until its raining or night time to sneak in through the side... when I'm playing with my friends I like to do crazy shit and I like to see crazy shit happening. That freedom and that openness is what provides that."





LIVING, BREATHING WORLD

UBISOFT DISCUSSES CREATING A VIBRANT ECOSYSTEM

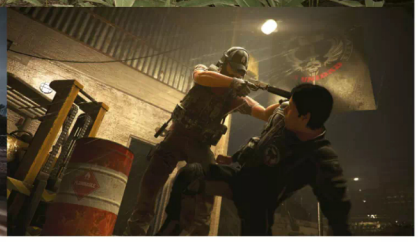
"It's kind of cool," says narrative director Sam Strachman on watching the game evolve. "As we started developing the game we started with something that's really empty and really open, but then you start to see something that [resembles] this living and breathing simulation."

And he isn't wrong, either. *Wildlands* isn't just Ubisoft's biggest open world, but its most vibrant and lifelike. The team at Ubisoft Paris has put a lot of time into ensuring the world around you feels like a real place. This process was kick-started by 30 developers embedding themselves in Bolivia to study the environment, meet the locals and generally build a picture of life in the area. After that, it's the tricky process of turning that reality into digital systems.

"We have an AI system where [civilians] are getting up and going to work. They are going for lunch and then coming home and going to sleep, and you have all the AI working off their individual agendas," notes Strachman. "Once the weather system, the day/night cycle and the AI systems are all running together it starts coming alive... the world keeps on living around you."







But that freedom and openness is also what holds the game back from truly feeling like a *Ghost Recon* game, let alone from feeling like a cohesive, driven open-world experience. The creative effort has been put into the hands of the players and that can mean play sessions career from one extreme to another in terms of enjoyment. The idea here, we suppose, is that there's always single player should you wish to cut external factors out and direct the experience for yourself.

"We wanted a game where from the beginning to the end there isn't a single thing that you can or can't do in one mode or the other – it was really important to balance the two," says Strachman. "They are both equally fun and equally have their own unique aspects to them, but you are not ever missing any content."

No content is missing, that is true, but *Wildlands* isn't as flexible in solo as it is in co-op. Ultimately, you are restricted by the AI teammates that follow you. The ability to change and adapt to missions is held back by a rudimentary command wheel system. The pacing and flexibility feels limited too in single player, building an experience that feels like less than the sum of its many shifting parts. Ultimately, *Wildlands* is a technically impressive and innovative concept – there are great moments to be had so long as you have the right personnel by your side – but whether there's enough here to hold attention throughout the many hours of play ahead remains to be seen.

GOING SOLO

Following a suite of co-operative fiascos we've decided to go solo, the three AI-controlled Ghosts are by our side as standard. We've shifted to the safer region of Itacua in an attempt to draw Yuri and Polito – a loving couple and the cartel's resident doctors of death – out of hiding by ruining their operations and stealing their expensive toys. The first to go is the sports car.

After a series of short infiltration missions we've zeroed in on its location. Under the cover of darkness, we planned on using stealth to sneak through and silently dispatch the guards situated around a small encampment. Sadly, the AI had other ideas. While they can be directed via a tactical wheel, the commands lack any of the depth or flexibility seen in the older *Conflict* games (let alone the *Ghost Recons*). You can't send specific soldiers to specific locations on the map, meaning you immediately lose the breadth of tactical opportunity and freedom supposedly available to you at all times. Numerous enemies can be tagged for simultaneous takedown – and you can switch between open/hold fire tac-options – but it lacks the satisfying end result that you'd expect to find in a *Tom Clancy* game. Your AI companions run into open spaces, they struggle to duck into cover and, should they become too separated from your position, they will simply magically teleport to your side.

And so a large firefight erupts through no fault of our own. The AI stumbles through the battle as we trade shots with enemies rushing our position; we push towards the car and take shelter in its plush interior. "This car is swanky," our character gruffly declares, "and there is a bloody condom in the glove box... make that two bloody condoms."

"I guess that confirms it is Yuri and Politos, right?" One of the other Ghosts laughs, as we return fire in one of the most ridiculous conversations we've ever heard in a Ubisoft game. "Even if the condoms do come as standard, it's still a sweet fucking car!"

At this point, all we can do is put the controller down and put our head in our hands.



"PROJECT CARS 2 BRINGS TOGETHER THE ESSENCE OF REAL RACING IN THE MOST BEAUTIFUL, AUTHENTICALLY CRAFTED, AND TECHNICALLY ADVANCED RACING GAME ON THE PLANET"

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME GREAT?

- The first game was excellent, once its launch hiccups were patched.
- Pure simulation games are rare in an era where accessibility is king.
- The breadth of knowledge between team and community is absolutely insane.
- The studio has a long history of great racing sims on PC behind it.









ETA Q4 2017 | **PUB** BANDAI NAMCO ENTERTAINMENT
DEV SLIGHTLY MAD STUDIOS | **TWITTER** @PROJECTCARSGAME

Project Cars 2

It doesn't get much realer than this

PS4

***Project Cars* was everything we had hoped it would be.** The Community Assisted Racing Simulator was a success for Slightly Mad Studios, going a long way to prove that there was still an appetite for ultra-realistic simulation racing games, putting *Forza Motorsport* and *Gran Turismo* to the test as it set a new benchmark for the genre.

Slightly Mad is back, then, with a sequel purpose-built to further push the envelope. Stacked against the competition, *Project Cars 2* seems uniquely progressive and deeply ambitious. The studio is evolving its stunning physics system, bringing a new degree of realistic simulation to the track; the weather system has been overhauled, furthering *Project Cars*' dominance over its long-standing rivals; it's once again involving the community at every step of development, implementing progress and innovations around their feedback and input. *Project Cars 2* is a game made by experts, steered by fans, and ultimately designed for the people that matter the most to the studio.

Slightly Mad Studios has a slightly mad commitment to constructing its sequel around critical and community feedback. The resulting experience is perhaps the closest the industry has come to bringing the essence of real racing to the realms of interactive entertainment. *Project Cars 2* is bringing a suite of upgrades to the studio's already impressive first effort; all 170 licensed cars are being 1:1 digitally recreated, the precision physics engine and AI systems are being overhauled, gamepad controls are being improved, while the dynamic real-time surface and seasonal conditions are being better integrated to directly affect vehicles and play. *Project Cars 2* is a deeply impressive, progressive experience.

Project Cars 2's weather isn't just for show – it's bringing a geographically-accurate, dynamic solar and weather system into play. That means that, in theory, every lap should unfold differently. As rain falls, pools of water will form on the track, affecting traction and handling, forcing drivers to alter their tactics and driving lines; later, as mud is worked across the track or as these pools evaporate in the sun, further changes to conditions will occur. The unpredictability of the environment is what will make *Project Cars 2* feel like the most realistic of the simulation racers. The way you manage the shifting conditions feeding into whether you are able to win or lose a race – just like in real life.

Considering how slow the competition has been in integrating realistic weather conditions into their respective games, it's truly impressive in what Slightly Mad has been able to achieve in just a fraction of the time. The condition of the tracks in *Project Cars 2* – the largest roster to ever feature in a console racing game – dynamically transition as the weather and time of day shifts, which alters the grip physics across tarmac, dirt, and ice surfaces. Weather and temperature change dynamically in real-time across all four seasons, essentially recreating the atmospheric conditions real-pro racing drivers have to contend with.

Slightly Mad Studios isn't reneging on its controversial approach to progression, once again ensuring that all cars and tracks will be available to players from the beginning of the game. The studio doesn't want to gate off content, ensuring that racing aficionados can drop directly into their tier of choice, while beginner motorsport fans will be able to experiment to find what class of vehicle and difficulty curve better suits their play style and competency. The studio hopes that, by having such an open-ended design, it can teach players the language of motorsport – encouraging a deeper love for and a greater understanding of the wider sport.

As ever, the focus for *Project Cars* is going to be on the state-of-the-art tech and the way it is driving the simulation towards more realistic avenues. Already we've seen this demonstrated; the focus on the way in which weather, time and temperature effects the tracks and vehicles in very real, dynamic ways – with the physics of tires affected by how they come into contact with track surfaces. It can be a little too much for the casual racing fan to understand. *Project Cars 2* is the next step for sim racers, and if you're the sort of racing fan that believes using the brake button is redundant, you'll likely encounter a lot of resistance from the game.

PROJECT CARS 2 is putting in practice laps with the Slightly Mad team. Keep up with its progress over here: **projectcarsgame.com**

ETA Q4 2017 | **PUB** FOCUS HOME INTERACTIVE | **DEV** DONTNOD | **TWITTER** @VAMPYRGAME

Vampyr

Emerging from the shadows

On the surface, it may look like the time to start worrying about *Vampyr*. At a Focus Home showcase event we recently attended, we were supposed to be given the opportunity to see the progress developer Dontnod – working on its follow up to *Life Is Strange* – had been making to its upcoming action RPG, but there was little new to see.

Vampyr is based on the London Spanish flu pandemic, with the outbreak augmented by the struggles of a doctor turned vampire; the push and pull between upholding the Hippocratic Oath and fulfilling a growing hunger for human blood the central narrative mechanic and gameplay hook. "The sum of your decisions and experiences as a Vampyr will trigger very different endings," said Dontnod's Phillipe Moreau. "We have four endings, including one if you manage to finish the game without killing anyone. Trust me, that's a hard challenge."

And we can see why. The story and levelling up mechanics are essentially tied together, where you are only rewarded XP if you decide to drain victims of their blood. That act will, of course, have its own set of consequences throughout *Vampyr*'s semi-open world, with the moral quandaries behind such an act pulling the story and difficulties in different directions; investigating potential victims, their lives, and trying to suss out any potential consequences is as open or closed as you'd like it to be. It's an interesting attempt to tie RPG levelling together with non-linear narrative convention, but we're desperate to play it for ourselves now, especially after such a seemingly lengthy development cycle – not to mention a release date on the nearing horizon.

Still, Dontnod did show us new alpha footage of *Vampyr* in an effort to showcase how far the game has come since E3 2016 – citing a desire to avoid wasting time and resources on a new demo build. And, well, it looks impressive; a far cry from the somewhat limited production values of episodic *Life Is Strange* and its forgettable predecessor *Remember Me*, whose deliciously ironic titling may never be topped by this industry. *Vampyr* has a finality to its investigation and decision systems that other games rarely attempt to include, let alone succeed at. It promises an experience that will force us to question and confront the acts that we are committing, a game of careful self-examination more than action blockbuster. While this all sounds good on paper, and the latest footage looks promising, it's simply impossible to tell until we have the opportunity to *finally* get hands on for ourselves. The time for *Vampyr* to emerge from the shadows is near, but whether Dontnod can guide it successfully into the light remains to be seen.

VAMPYR is the latest curve-ball from eclectic French developer Dontnod. Stalk the game's progress here: **dont-nod.com**









WHAT MAKES THIS GAME GREAT?

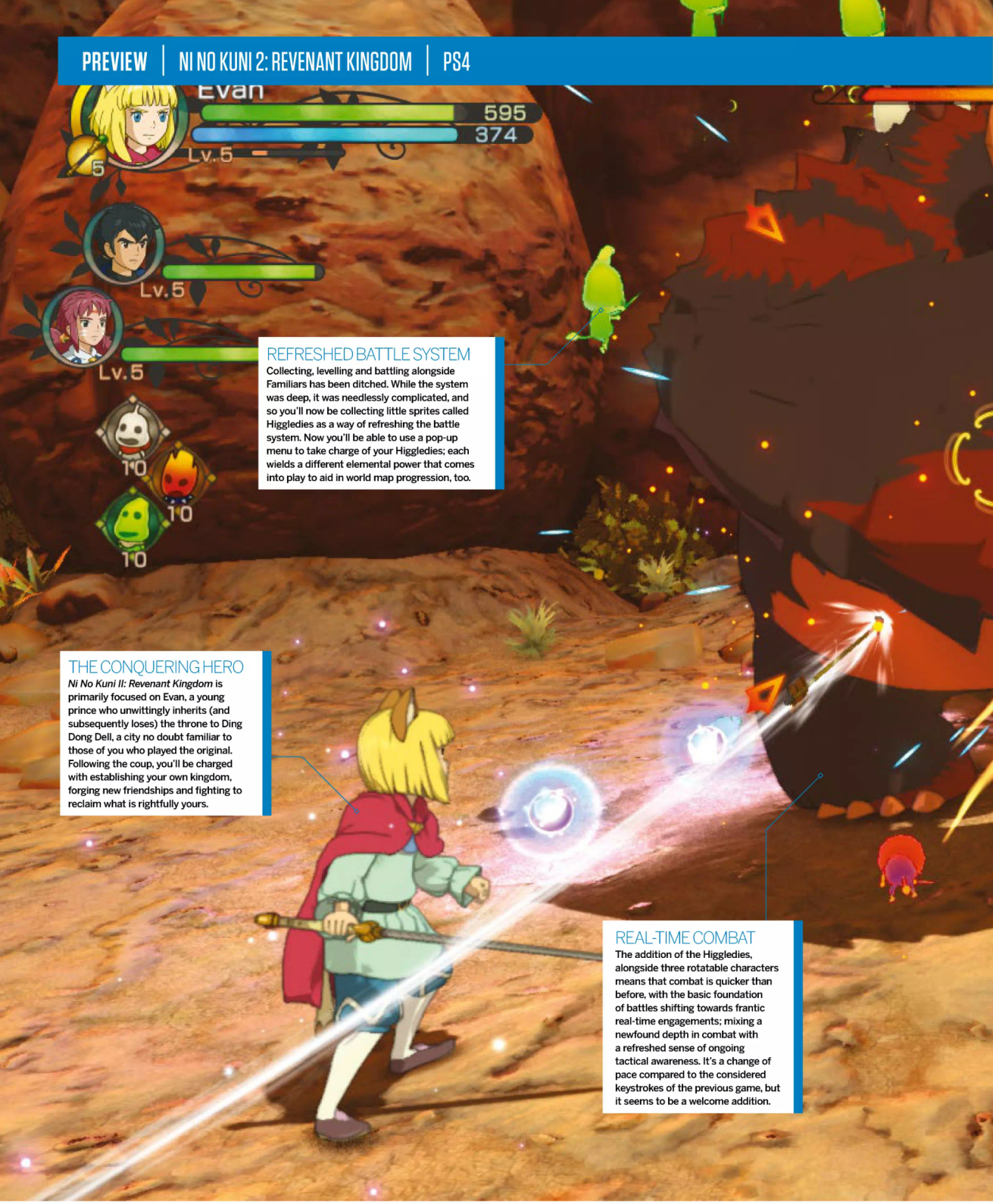
△ *Life Is Strange* surprised us all – here's hoping this can do the same.

□ The 1918 setting and general aesthetic are really cool, as is the main premise.

✕ There's great potential for the story to take very different turns depending on how you act.

○ You get to be a vampire without actually having to drink blood.

△○✕□ **Unlike *Life Is Strange*, *Vampyr* will feature combat; necessary given that you are hunted by an array of different vampire hunter outfits.**



REFRESHED BATTLE SYSTEM

Collecting, levelling and battling alongside Familiars has been ditched. While the system was deep, it was needlessly complicated, and so you'll now be collecting little sprites called Higgledies as a way of refreshing the battle system. Now you'll be able to use a pop-up menu to take charge of your Higgledies; each wields a different elemental power that comes into play to aid in world map progression, too.

THE CONQUERING HERO

Ni No Kuni II: Revenant Kingdom is primarily focused on Evan, a young prince who unwittingly inherits (and subsequently loses) the throne to Ding Dong Dell, a city no doubt familiar to those of you who played the original. Following the coup, you'll be charged with establishing your own kingdom, forging new friendships and fighting to reclaim what is rightfully yours.

REAL-TIME COMBAT

The addition of the Higgledies, alongside three rotatable characters means that combat is quicker than before, with the basic foundation of battles shifting towards frantic real-time engagements; mixing a newfound depth in combat with a refreshed sense of ongoing tactical awareness. It's a change of pace compared to the considered keystrokes of the previous game, but it seems to be a welcome addition.



GORGEOUS PRESENTATION

While Studio Ghibli isn't providing beautiful 2D animations for this sequel (the studio is on active hiatus), the game does admittedly look stunning under the guiding hand of lead studio Level-5. Running at 60fps on PS4, *Revenant Kingdom* looks to be a much fuller realisation of *Wrath Of The White Witch*'s cinematic aspirations; it is colourful, evocative and stunning to spend time within.

MR PRESIDENT

One of the playable characters joining your active roster will be Roland, who is actually a citizen of Ichi No Kuni – that's our 'real' world, for those of you not keeping up at home – where he was a 48-year old president of an undisclosed nation. Now he find himself transformed into a 20-year-old warrior in the realm of *Ni No Kuni*, charged with protecting a kid with cat ears, because reasons.

ETA 2017 | **PUB** BANDAI NAMCO
DEV LEVEL-5 | **TWITTER** @LEVEL5_JA

Ni No Kuni 2: Revenant Kingdom

A brave new world

PS4

Arriving ahead of a generation shift, *Ni No Kuni: Wrath Of The White Witch* never received the love and admiration it perhaps deserved. Developed by Level-5 – in collaboration with the famed Studio Ghibli – the 2013 JRPG delighted with its stunning presentation, deep systems and story of love and loss cast across two worlds.

So a sequel always seemed like such a dizzying proposition, the opportunity for Level-5 to iterate upon some of the weaker elements of *Wrath Of The White Witch* – we are still haunted by the combat grind – but now it's here, we're having to approach it with some degree of caution; Ghibli is not attached, and links to the original are tangential at best.

Although that isn't to say there isn't a lot to love about *Revenant Kingdom*. Ultimately, Level-5 is aware that many missed out on the original and so the concept is being refocused. The studio is suggesting that we think of this version of the *Ni No Kuni* world as a reflection of the one we previously adventured across. Returning city Ding Dong Dell may be the star this time out, but it'll be different, older; separating the games by hundreds of years gives Level-5 the space to tell a new story, to invite new gamers in and, integrally, make sweeping changes to the core systems.

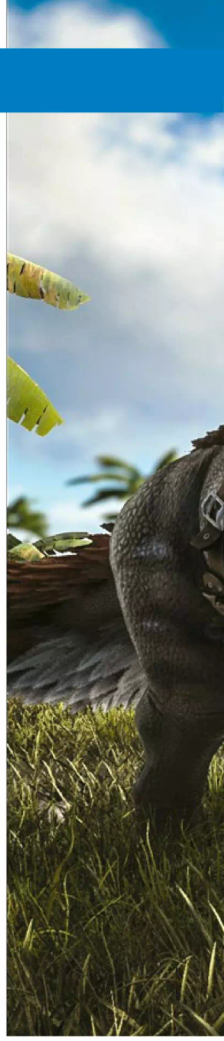
In reality, while we are having a hard time of letting go of Oliver and, of course, Mr. Drippy, there's something delightfully refreshing about the approach to *Revenant Kingdom* that Level-5 is taking here. The focus is moving from the sharing of souls between the denizens of *Ni No Kuni* and our real world, instead we will see new hero Evan fighting to reclaim Ding Dong Dell and establish his own kingdom – what would a game be in 2017 without a crafting element, eh?

Fantastic JRPGs are hard to come by these days, and so long as Level-5 can continue to dutifully iterate on what has come before – while still retaining the spirit and heart that made the original so memorable – we're willing to give it a chance. Besides, with an exact 2017 release still to be confirmed, who's to say that there isn't still time to cast a tidy Welsh companion?

NI NO KUNI 2: REVENANT KINGDOM is grinding out XP in the hope of out-levelling its predecessor. Check it out over here: **level5ia.com**



△○×□ **There's an *Assassin's Creed*-esque sci-fi element to the whole thing – not that you'll notice as a T-Rex chases you through a jungle.**





ETA OUT NOW | **PUB** STUDIO WILDCARD | **DEV** IN-HOUSE

Ark: Survival Evolved

Not quite a walk in the *Jurassic Park*

PS4

Following 18 months in various forms of early access on PC, a voyage on to consoles and a controversial decision to release expansions and DLC before it's even finished, *Ark: Survival Evolved* is finally nearing completion. So with developer Studio Wildcard planning to have the base game finalised by the spring, there's plenty to look out for in the open-world of dinosaurs, muscles and den building.

The game has garnered something of a cult following on PC – question is, how well does it stack up on consoles? Fears over any sense of feature reduction to make such a grand experience functional on PS4 can be banished from the off – every element that's made *Ark* so famous (and infamous) is present and correct. That's right – the *Skyrim/Turok/Minecraft* mash-up has arrived in full-fat mode, with its developer intending to bring the consoles on par with the PC version.

So you can build structures and fortify them into strongholds, create or join tribes with other players to control regions and hunt and tame the 60+ species of prehistoric creatures that roam *Ark's* lush gameworld, *Far Cry Primal*-style. Of course, Ubisoft's open-world caveman simulator only let you tame a sabretooth tiger – *Ark* lets you pop a saddle on everything from a Pteranodon to a Giganotosaurus. Yes, that even includes a T-Rex, you crazy kids.

That number of is set to swell with the recent addition of five new species (Cnidaria Omnimorph, Troodon Magnanimus, Pegomastax Fructarator, Tusoteuthis Vampyrus and Therizinosaurus Multiensis) and there are even plans to raise the total count to more than 100 – although we doubt we'll get that many by the time Studio Wildcard's planned Spring 2017 'completion' date. Still, Dr Henry Wu would be proud.

Sadly, one of the biggest issues – a sheer lack of tutorials – has followed the game onto PS4, making it consistently non-inclusive to inexperienced players. Wildcard obviously wants *Ark* to feel as intimidating as its concept suggests, but for a game with as much scope as this – offering players everything from the ability to farm crops and build strongholds, to the power to explore vast plains and underwater caves (a new addition in an update in mid-January) – you feel instantly, hopelessly lost without a group of experienced friends and an exhaustive Wiki guide to help you on your way.

Make no mistake: the *Ark* world wants to beat you bloody and break you the moment that you wake up half naked with an implant in your arm (which is used for bringing up your token RPG-esque inventory). The community is full of players straight out of the *DayZ* school for sociopaths, who will club you to death on sight. And if it's not the other players that get you, you'll either starve to death, break a bone and bleed out or be eviscerated by a pack of hungry wild raptors.

But when it clicks – linking up with players who aren't looking to paint their stronghold with your viscera and hunting down your first big dino and taming it with a carefully-crafted saddle – *Ark* reveals its true potential and you finally feel like a new-age *Turok*, bow and all. There's a great game inside – you just have to cut through a lot of obnoxious undergrowth to reach the good stuff.

From a mechanical point of view, *Ark* is a real mixed bag. Our time on the island meandered between relatively stable, to almost unplayable as the framerate dropped to single figures. Sure, this is still a game 'in-development', but with its intended completion date so near, we'd expect it to be a lot more stable than this. There are also plenty of bugs yet to be ironed out – an odd blue light that fills your screen every time you're near water being one of the most irritating.

Ark: Survival Evolved has the potential to be one of the most exciting new survival titles on PS4, but with so many other titles vying for your time, Studio Wildcard still has plenty of work on its hands.

ARK: SURVIVAL EVOLVED is being raised by Studio Wildcard to survive anything. Find out more here: **survivetheark.com**



WHAT MAKES THIS GAME GREAT?

- It's got dinosaurs in it. Lots of them. You can tame and ride them all, too.
- It involves both hunting and being hunted, by other players as well as the wildlife.
- Crafting and RPG systems seem to pretty deep, to there's plenty to get your teeth into.
- There's great potential for emergent gameplay stories to play out.





THE STANDALONE MODE THAT NEVER WAS

Back in 2016, while still working on the ever-expanding main game, Studio Wildcard announced that it would be releasing a standalone mode based in the same world as *Ark*. *Survival Of The Fittest* was planned to be a free spin-off that ultimately turned the game into a 72-player MOSA (Multiplayer Online Survival Arena) where users would fight to the death, *Hunger Games*-style.

While the main game itself naturally leaned towards PvP encounters, streamlining the game into a more tense, combative experience made *Ark: Survival Of The Fittest* a far more competitive offering. Studio Wildcard even organised an eSports tournament, with a tasty prize pool of $50,000. However, reluctance to monetise the mode soon saw it absorbed back into the main game.



ETA 11 APRIL | **PUB** TEAM17 | **DEV** PLAYTONIC GAMES

Yooka-Laylee

Playtonic joins the local multiplayer revival

PS4 **Everything we've learnt so far about *Yooka-Laylee* reads like a love letter to the glittering heyday of 3D platformers.** As we hurtle towards launch day for the crowdfunded title, headed up by a quite astonishing lineup of industry veterans responsible for games like *Banjo-Kazooie* and *Perfect Dark*, we almost feel nervous for the Playtonic team. Not only is £2.1 million of Kickstarter backers' money behind this ambitious project, but it can be argued that the nostalgic hopes and dreams of twenty-somethings the world over are riding on *Yooka-Laylee* being the Rare-style 3D platformer they've been awaiting for years.

Playtonic certainly has its mind focused on the modern market and is displaying the technical nous to get a beautiful result out of modern tools, despite the team cutting its collective teeth in the glory days of the late Nineties and early 2000s. However, recent announcements hint at a group of artists and devs with a keen eye on the past, too. For one, Playtonic has included eight distinct mini-games in *Yooka-Laylee*, based in a separate arcade-style environment cultivated by the dinosaur Rextro (complete with utterly mad, garbled voice work that has tumbled straight out of *Banjo-Kazooie*).

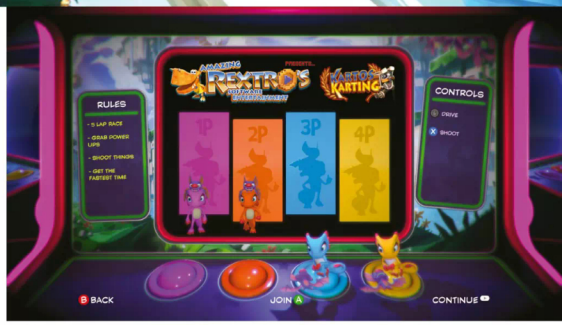
"We've always been big fans of local multiplayer games and the kind of interaction they cause that you don't often get online," begins Playtonic's Andy Robinson. "Putting our own competitive games in *Yooka-Laylee* was mostly because we are fans. The likes of *Banjo-Tooie* and *Smash Bros.* get rolled most lunchtimes in our office."

The games themselves come in diverse forms, and from recent videos we can see puzzle aspects, a racing game and battle-centric modes, too. This comes at a time when mini-games and local multiplayer modes have rather gone out of fashion, to be honest – online multiplayer is now the order of the day, while local experiences to be enjoyed with friends have taken a back seat.

The main single-player mode in *Yooka-Laylee* also boasts its own local couch-play element. "At any point during the single-player adventure, a second player can jump in using another controller and take charge of the Bee Team, an on-screen entourage who can help out by grabbing hard-to-reach Quills, preventing traps from damaging Yooka and Laylee, or by collecting and storing butterflies in order to release them later on when the buddy duo are low on health," explains Robinson.

Although this Bee Team addition sounds, at first, like it might not be the most meaningful addition of a co-op component we've seen, it's still a taste of how deep Playtonic wants *Yooka-Laylee* to be. Far from just being a fitting homage to the N64 days when Rare was the best mark of quality a game could bear, the prodigiously talented dev team, marketable characters and varied game modes that make up *Yooka-Laylee* could mark the start of a new wave of gold-standard 3D platformers when it leaps into action in April.

YOOKA-LAYLEE is what happens when a bunch of the ex-*Banjo* team decide they want their genre back. More here: **playtonicgames.com**



△○×□ **Eight distinct mini-games have been revealed as a supplement to the main story mode in *Yooka-Laylee*.**





WHAT MAKES THIS GAME GREAT?

- The team's experience in the genre means they're unlikely to put a foot wrong.
- We're always up for more local multiplayer games, even when they're just mini-games.
- When was the last time you played a decent, non-Nintendo 3D plaformer? Exactly.
- It's a wonderful throwback to a bygone era, and in the best possible way.





WHAT MAKES THIS GAME GREAT?

△ Before *Resi 7* arrived, *Outlast* was probably the best horror game on PS4.

□ There's no PS VR support. Why is this good? Because people would *actually die*.

✕ More varied settings means new kinds of scares, and even more unpredictability. Gulp.

○ Based on the demo, it's in the running to be the scariest game this generation.

△○×□ **The game is set in the same universe as the original, meaning there will certainly be supernatural elements.**

ETA Q1 2017 | **PUB** RED BARRELS | **DEV** IN-HOUSE | **TWITTER** @THEREDBARRELS

Outlast 2

Grave encounters

PS4

You can thank one person for *Outlast*'s widespread popularity: PewDiePie. His first 'let's play' video of the first-person horror game currently stands just shy of *17 million* views – that's one hell of an advertisement. But what made *Outlast* stand out from the other, incredibly similar, horror games he was peddling at the time – *Amnesia*, *Slender* et al? Easy: a camcorder, and a surprising amount of polish for an indie developer that was cutting its teeth.

The found-footage approach worked wonders for Red Barrels, *Outlast*'s developer, and much like horror sequels from Hollywood, Red Barrels is looking to double down on the scares, set-pieces and sinister settings that made the original *Outlast* so compelling. And that's all it can do, really. Creating a first-person horror game where the player can't fight back is an almost Faustian deal: on the one hand you have genuine fear – due the emphasis on avoiding enemies, and the inability to fight back – however, there's only so many ways that limited gameplay can be developed on. So it's a logical move for the developer to go big on scare tactics and fearmongering in this (no doubt terrifying) new instalment.

And based on its demo, *Outlast 2* delivers. While the original game was set solely in an asylum, the sequel looks to take you across a tour of a deranged slice of the American south – from a primitive commune, to a seemingly-haunted school through to a homestead, complete with a game of 'hide-and-don't-die' in a cornfield – with a Jonestown-like cult being the constant that ties everything together. It's a nice change, and shows that the team can produce something interesting outside of the iron cells and beaten-down corridors of the original game's asylum.

It kind of helps, as a horror game, to generate real and genuine scares, too, and Red Barrels is on track to shit you up. Jump scares, while cheap, are used sparingly and aren't telegraphed like a teen slasher film – this is complemented by some genuinely unsettling imagery: a silhouette of a person hanging in a school corridor, a pit of dead bodies, cultists' flashlight beams peering through a cornfield in which you are hiding – all of which are emphasised through *Outlast*'s defining feature: its monochrome video camcorder.

While *Outlast 2* can be dismissed as 'more of the same', it is clear that Red Barrels is attempting to create something that's a significant step up in quality, despite confining itself to a genre where you can't really innovate – mechanically, at least. The game has a tentative release date of Q1 2017, however time is running out on that window, so it's a fair bet to see this one later on in the year. Regardless, it looks to be worth the wait.

OUTLAST 2 is messing around with a camera in some spooky house or other – what could go wrong? Find out here: **redbarrelsgames.com**





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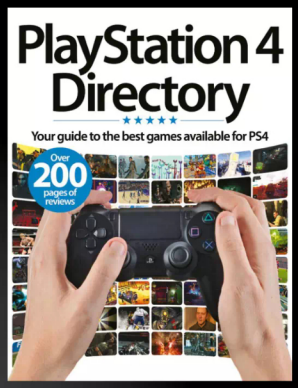


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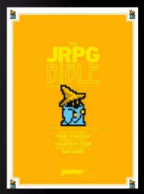






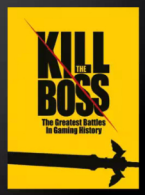












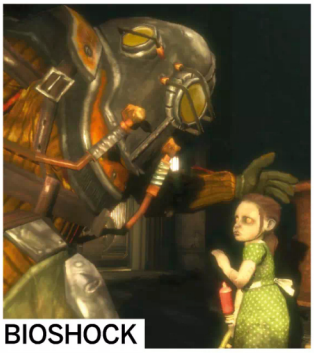


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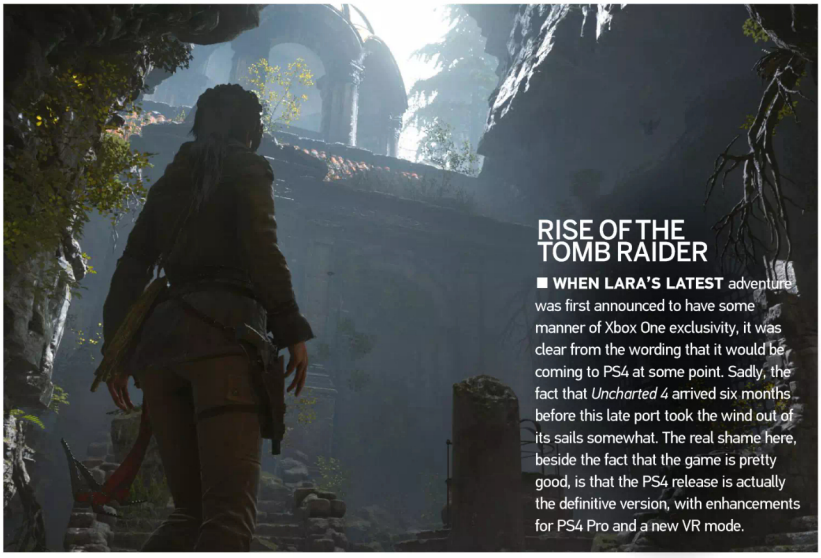
★★★★★ TEN OF THE BEST ★★★★★ LATECOMERS

GREAT GAMES THAT MADE THEIR DEBUTS ON OTHER SYSTEMS



BIOSHOCK

■ **THERE'S NOTHING TO** blame for this belated trip to Rapture beyond the delayed launch of the PS3. The console had only just been released when PC and 360 players were already climbing in the bathysphere and making their way down to an unforgettable undersea experience. We had to wait over a year before it finally arrived on PS3, just like with *Oblivion* before it. Avoiding spoilers was not easy...



RISE OF THE TOMB RAIDER

■ **WHEN LARA'S LATEST** adventure was first announced to have some manner of Xbox One exclusivity, it was clear from the wording that it would be coming to PS4 at some point. Sadly, the fact that *Uncharted 4* arrived six months before this late port took the wind out of its sails somewhat. The real shame here, beside the fact that the game is pretty good, is that the PS4 release is actually the definitive version, with enhancements for PS4 Pro and a new VR mode.



FINAL DOOM

■ **IT'S HARDLY FAIR** to point the finger at Sony on this one – id's classic shooter was originally released half a decade before PlayStation was born. Still, despite how late it was, this port of *Doom* and *Doom II* still managed to turn heads, simply because no other console had been able to come so close to the PC version of the game at the time. And what *Doom* started, *Quake II* finished – it was one of the most impressive shooters of its day.

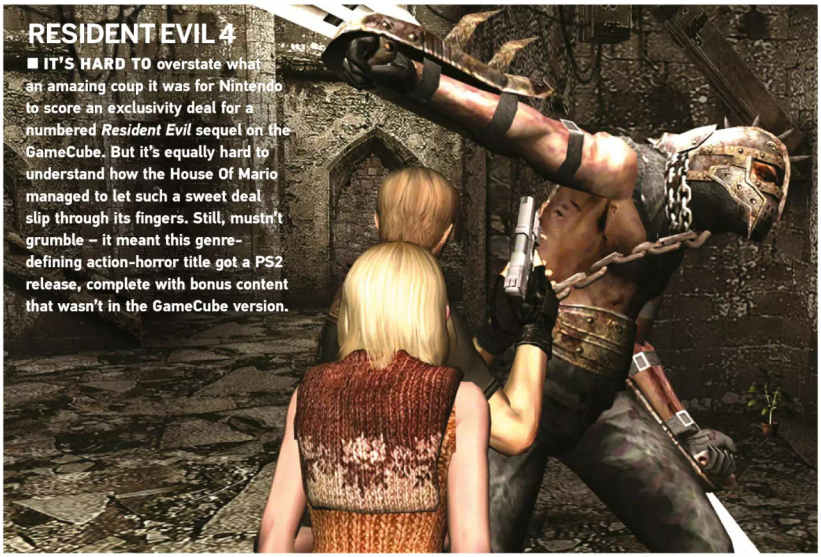


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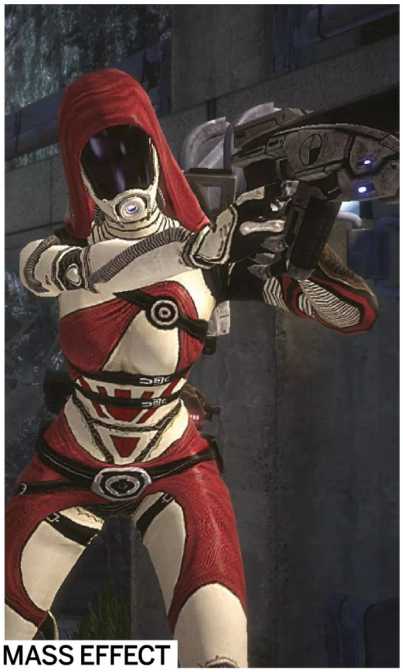
■ **OKAY, SO THIS** one is a little unfair as the version of the game we ended up getting isn't strictly the same as the original. Derek Yu's platform adventure started life in basic pixel art form on PC, before getting a makeover close to five years later. That's the version we got on PS3 and Vita (and later PS4), but even *that* came out a year after the 360 release.

www.imagineshop.co.uk

RESIDENT EVIL 4



■ **IT'S HARD TO** overstate what an amazing coup it was for Nintendo to score an exclusivity deal for a numbered *Resident Evil* sequel on the GameCube. But it's equally hard to understand how the House Of Mario managed to let such a sweet deal slip through its fingers. Still, mustn't grumble – it meant this genre-defining action-horror title got a PS2 release, complete with bonus content that wasn't in the GameCube version.



MASS EFFECT

■ **IT'S ALWAYS FELT** kind of weird to us that EA and BioWare elected to jump straight in with the second game on PS3, especially considering what a masterpiece of world-building the original game is. Instead, for the launch of *Mass Effect 2*, the team just worked in a little interactive visual novel to determine what major choices would be carried over from the nonexistent first game. It was better than nothing, and we finally got the complete package later. Literally – it wasn't until the release of the *Mass Effect Trilogy* collection that we got to play the first game, five years after it was first released.



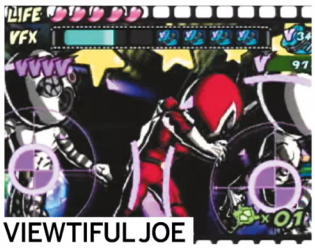
FINAL FANTASY VI

■ **PLAYSTATION MIGHT BE** a name synonymous with the rise of 3D gaming, but RPGs were one of the slower genres to catch up. Early efforts like *Suikoden* still used sprite-based visuals barely better than what the SNES could manage. That's one of the reasons *FFVII* blew so many minds upon release, which had a knock-on effect that Square made the most of. *Final Fantasy* was so big that fans would buy anything with that logo on. This led to a re-release of SNES classic *Final Fantasy VI* almost a decade after its original release, bundled it with a *FFX* demo. Cheeky.



CRAZY TAXI

■ **SEGA DIDN'T WASTE** any time in porting some of the best titles from its struggling Dreamcast system to PS2, and this classic arcade racer is one of the finest of the lot. Its place on this list was secured when it was released late *for a second time*, and not only late but actually worse, too. The PS3 version of the game didn't have the licensed soundtrack of the original, meaning fans expecting that amazing Offspring sing-a-long were immediately put off.



VIEWTIFUL JOE

■ **JUST AS WITH** *Resi 4*, this stylish combat platformer was originally intended to be part of the 'Capcom Five', a quintet of GameCube exclusives. These two games – as well as the wonderfully weird *killer7* – all hit PS2 around a year after their original launch, leaving Nintendo zealots who swore by these 'exclusives' to dine on humble pie. We got the three games of the five that mattered, too – *P.N.03* was bloody awful and *Dead Phoenix* was cancelled.



HALF-LIFE 2

■ **THERE'S PRETTY MUCH** no top ten list like this that *The Orange Box* can't be name-checked on for some reason or another, and here it is again. This compilation not only gave us a belated chance to dive into one of the most well-received and influential games of our time, but also brought Valve's class-based FPS Team Fortress to console for the first time, too. The set itself wasn't on time, either – we got it a few months after the 360 version, for some reason.


RIME



THE LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

"When you are responsible for other people – for the wellbeing of their families – sometimes you can get a lot of vertigo. But the sooner you get used to the feeling of always falling the better, because in life you often find yourself falling forever."

Tequila Works' CEO Raúl Rubio knows that the development of *Rime* is like no other. For the better part of four years, his studio has been home to one of the most anticipated independent adventure games of recent memory. But for the longest time it has also existed only on the periphery, as a project that found itself plunged into darkness as quickly as it was pushed into the light.

For many years there have been plenty more questions than there were answers for us to give, though Tequila Works has finally opened up the doors to its mysterious, mesmerising island, inviting us to Madrid to play *Rime* for ourselves – persistence pays off in the end, don't let anybody tell you otherwise. That, clearly, was a daunting prospect for the studio, particularly for one so devilishly committed to seeing

AFTER YEARS IN THE SHADOWS, RIME FINALLY REVEALS ITS TRUE NATURE

this particular passion project through to the end, and to getting it right.

"As an independent developer, there are many things that leave you sleepless at night," admits Rubio, who also serves as creative director of *Rime*. For Tequila Works, surviving on the success of only one title for four years – *Deadlight*, marking the studio's debut in 2012 – could well have been one of them. It's easy to understand why many of those years may have felt like a lifetime for the team, a small staff that has fluctuated between 15 and 30 throughout development. It's enough to keep anybody awake at night. But *Rime* is special, worth fighting for. Much like the mystery that surrounds its protracted development, *Rime* is, by its very nature, dreamlike.

"I'm pretty sure that if mankind one day discovered time travel it will be because of game designers," laughs Rubio. "You know, there are many things we could [have] done differently, but we cannot go back in time... there were so many times that we were tempted to do something different [but], in the end, I'm really happy that we stayed true to our vision."

At its simplest, that vision is thus: there is always an island, there is always a tower and there is always a boy; what occurs after these three elements converge is for you to discover, to parse and unpack, taking as »

much or as little from the experience as you desire. *Rime* has undergone a huge transformation in the last two years, the period in which it disappeared from the spotlight – prompting fears it had been cancelled before the studio was able to reacquire the IP rights from Sony and earn its multiplatform freedom – though much of this is understated. Tequila Works has delivered on its vision, even if that path wasn't always clear.

"It's like I want to climb to the top of Everest but I do not know which route I want to follow. Sometimes you feel like you are not going to make it at all, but then the next day it's like 'oh yeah, we got it!' and then you can finally move forward," he says, later adding, "if we could go back in time we would probably release this game in 2015 instead of 2017. But, yeah, that's a different story."

He laughs this comment off, but what if that *is* the story? *Rime* has followed an unconventional development path because it is an inherently unconventional game. A uniquely spirited adventure, *Rime* has been purposefully designed to evoke an emotional response from the player, authentic in its ambition to tell a personal story – though what that may be will differ from player to player. So, where has *Rime* been since its debut as a PlayStation 4 exclusive at Gamescom way back in 2013? Tequila Works has been building it up and tearing it back down, and the result of that process – and how it got there – is really quite fascinating.

Following a mesmerising reveal, *Rime* drew immediate attention. With little information to go on, it was quickly assumed that *Rime* would bring together the intimate, emotive storytelling of *Ico* with the charming spectacle of *The Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker*. As it should happen, aside from the gorgeous sun-soaked cel-shaded visuals, those comparisons were well meaning but entirely misplaced. It has more in common with the likes of *Journey* and *The Witness*, but even that doesn't quite give you the whole picture.





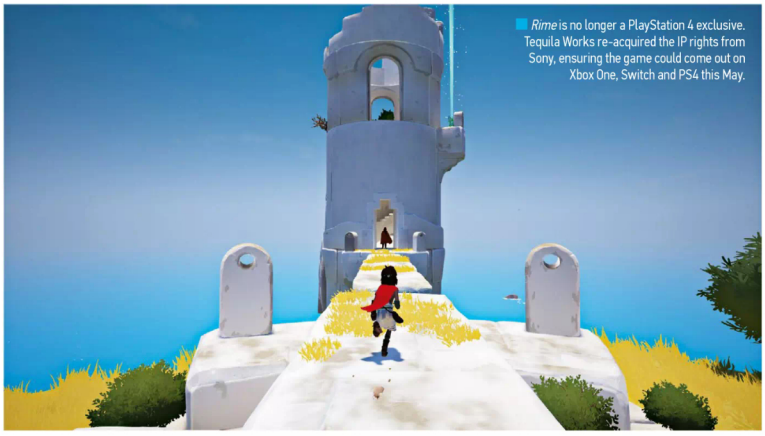
> "There is a thin line between creating a compelling and challenging experience, and making it frustrating. Frustration was something that we wanted to avoid in Rime"

When Rubio describes *Rime* as 'risky', well, he isn't wrong. From the moment you first drift ashore on the island, what you see is what you get. There are no HUD, tutorials or objective markers to be found, instead players are guided through to points of interest by smart visual navigation tools; the circling of birds in a Dreamcast-blue sky, the discolouration of grass to denote exploration opportunities or the distant motions of a character shrouded in a vivid red cloak to get you back on track. This, the visual language, was something Tequila spent "literally years working on" as, despite looking beautiful, there were frustrations within its early design.

"The game looked beautiful but people got frustrated for two reasons: Firstly, people love exploring but there was nothing for them to find, and secondly, they were exploring and they forgot what they were doing and where they came from. Just solving that took years. It's been something we gave a lot of attention to. This is a game with no dialogue, no HUD... so doing that has been hard."

The nameless protagonist does not speak, but they can shout at the press of a button – the warble of the small child activating mysterious runes and objects scattered around the island, the backbone to many of the puzzles. A narrative runs silently through it all, told through broad, beautiful musical keystrokes and subtle environmental storytelling cues. *Rime* is often beautiful and affecting – we spent much of our time with it caught in silent appreciation, in awe at its masterful construction. Navigation was intuitive and engaging, we never felt lost for direction whilst still being caught





Rime is no longer a PlayStation 4 exclusive. Tequila Works re-acquired the IP rights from Sony, ensuring the game could come out on Xbox One, Switch and PS4 this May.

up in the wider adventure. The challenge here, of course, will be maintaining that feeling throughout the entire adventure.

Rubio notes that to achieve this feeling, *Rime* has undergone careful (sometimes sweeping) iteration, a process that could have only occurred in the time Tequila Works has given itself to breathe. The game that existed all those years ago, while thematically and visually identical, seems to have warped and evolved into something greater. "Even if it sounds weird, the last two years have actually been removing stuff from the game," Rubio chuckles. "Streamlining it to make it more elegant and minimalist."

"We like to joke around and say that making games is hard, but the reality is that making games *is* hard. These last two years have been polishing and sometimes fixing things that we didn't believe was true to the vision. For starters, I think we had far more puzzles two years ago. But *Rime* was supposed to be an exploration adventure; we wanted the player to discover what was beyond the surface. But two years ago it was more like: get into the room, have a puzzle, get into another room, another puzzle. All the game was like that but it was not what we wanted... now we are very close to what we originally wanted to do with the game in the first place."

The result is puzzles that are carefully woven into broader areas of the world. *Rime*'s island has a day/night cycle, which can later be manipulated at towering shrines; the puzzles play with perspective, the use of shadows, the focus of light and sound, with many of these elements shifting with the setting of the sun.

"There is a thin line between creating a compelling and challenging experience, and making it frustrating. Frustration was something that we wanted to avoid in *Rime*, that's the reason that you cannot die in the game," says Rubio, noting a design philosophy that has carried far past *Rime*'s puzzle design, affecting everything from the size of the island to even the animation of the child's movements. "We had pretty complex puzzles, but now they are on a curve," he continues, noting that – while he was forbidden from playing *The Witness* during development by other staff – he can now see how comparisons would have been drawn by the community.

The puzzles that now exist in *Rime* are simple but satisfying, at least through the opening hours, designed to impede progress and immerse you in your surroundings. Later the challenge will increase through the introduction of dangerous predators, large enough in size to break puzzles and crush you. But underneath all of this – outside of the obvious puzzles – a more difficult challenge presented itself. "I must be a sociopath or something, because I love hiding small hints and details in there for people to discover," says Rubio, as we lamented the discovery of certain objects within particular spaces with seemingly nowhere to place them. For those that want to get everything out of *Rime*, intuitive exploration will be a must.

"Paying attention to the little details is essential to understanding it. You can play it and not pay attention to the story if you want, but you get these glimpses into something deeper. You aren't supposed to be there in the first place; you are always, as a player, assuming that you are the ones trespassing these forbidden, unseen civilisations. That you are normal and they are the weird ones, right? But they are as puzzled as you by your presence and that's the beginning of something."

The "they" he refers to we wouldn't like to spoil, but Rubio is quick to suggest that everything isn't as it seems on the island, sweeping between beautiful Mediterranean vistas, deep bleak labyrinths and barren desert planes. "The world is reacting to your presence... you just wait, you'll see how weird the game gets."

Tequila Works is quick to talk about its 'vision' for *Rime*. Pressing a little deeper, everybody we spoke with at the studio was happy to reflect on how personal the project has been for them as individuals. It's natural to assume that this is in reference to the time and »

SAVED BY STEAM

HOW AN INDIE STUDIO IS ABLE TO SURVIVE FOR FOUR YEARS WITHOUT A RELEASE

Tequila Works isn't like many other independent studios, it has been able to exist off of the back of just one title. Four years is a lifetime in this industry, though the studio credits Steam largely with its survival.

"I can tell you that it was the combination of *Deadlight* and Steam," says Tequila Works' CEO Raúl Rubio. "Steam saved our ass. We [had] a very tough year from the release of *Deadlight* until we could finally start *Rime*. The first year of *Rime* we fully financed ourselves. If it weren't for the money we got through *Deadlight* and Steam we would be dead, for sure. The logical step would have been to do a sequel, but we always knew that unless we had something really interesting to tell or experience then what was the point of making a sequel?"

***Deadlight* sold over 2 million copies and that, it seems, was enough to keep the dream alive. That has allowed Tequila Works to grow into a position where it can not only build, refine and finish *Rime*, but also delve into other projects such as *The Sexy Brutale* (a murder mystery made in collaboration with Cavalier Game Studios) and two other unannounced projects that are pushing the boundaries of modern technology.**



Rime is, at its heart, an exploration and puzzle game. It features no combat, with players having to use the environment and their wits to escape predators and the mysteries of the island.

tears poured into development, but they are in fact speaking to something much deeper that simmers beneath the surface.

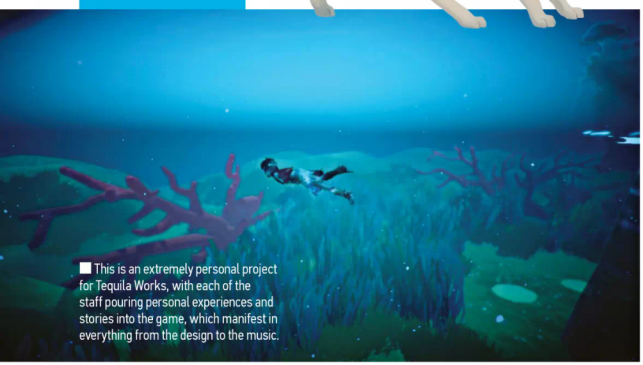
"When we started *Rime*, we wanted to do something that had a simple story that anybody could understand, but it has a deeper layer that is very personal. We are doing something that is finding what you have inside your self – in your heart – and projecting it outside, that's why it is so personal... we have literally put personal things, stories and memories in there."

"There's a part towards the end of the first chapter," recalls Rubio when we press for an example, "where you enter a tower and you find this labyrinth that is in darkness and you use light to guide yourself through. That is inspired by a personal experience that I lived when I was a child, when I got lost in a cave; I had to use the flash from a camera to get out."

It's easy to see examples of this scattered all throughout the game. It adds new context to the smallest pieces of detail, to the design of particular puzzles and sombre swells of the audio in certain moments. In one secret area we happened across, the boy's powerful shout was suddenly changed to a whimper; we had stumbled across a room adorned with red roses that led towards a grave. It's an upsetting, powerful discovery when armed with the knowledge of its design and purpose, although it's left purposefully oblique in order for us to be able to draw our own conclusions.

"That's the beauty of *Rime*, we don't have a narrator telling you everything; it's something that you have to figure out for yourself. You can find your own interpretation and it doesn't need to define your experience and that's okay," says Rubio. "When you play the game from beginning to end, one thing we noticed is that each person comes away with a different understanding of the ending. That was never intended," he says, laughing, "but I'm really glad we achieved that."





This is an extremely personal project for Tequila Works, with each of the staff pouring personal experiences and stories into the game, which manifest in everything from the design to the music.

> When we started Rime, we wanted to do something that had a simple story that anybody could understand, but it has a deeper layer that is very personal

Rime is an understated adventure. It is quiet and sombre, with those feelings offset by excitement and thrills as you begin to solve puzzles and pull back the layers of mystery. The gameplay itself is simple, but ultimately effective. *Rime* knows exactly what it wants to do and achieves it in style. It's a testament to Tequila Works' unwavering creative vision. At times, that vision led the studio down some dangerous paths but it is, as Rubio said earlier, akin to wanting to climb Everest but not knowing which route to follow.

"With *Rime*, we knew we wanted to create an emotional response from the player but the thing is, how? How we were going to do that was not clear and we had to experiment a lot. We did hundreds of prototypes, and countless experiments on what kind of gameplay we wanted," admits Rubio. "Certain areas we have redone eight or ten times, huge areas of the world, because it didn't work for some reason – it was too difficult, you got lost. Some areas were fully open world but user tests show that people got lost, because literally you have no map in this game. Sometimes reducing is better. It can sound odd for gamers, but sometimes you have to deconstruct and build it again, with fewer pieces."

This is a process Tequila Works is intimately familiar with. You may recall that – during the dark days of lost contact with *Rime* – it was long rumoured that the game could have been a Microsoft exclusive, but the company passed on it, allowing Sony to pick it up. In a parallel world, *Rime* would have been *Gauntlet* meets *Minecraft* meets *Jason And The Argonauts*; a survival sim with light crafting elements and tower-defence combat. This, in fact, was only partly true.

Before *Rime*, there was *Echoes Of Osiris*. Rubio is quick to make a separation between the two projects: "Just for clarification, *Osiris* and *Rime* were not the same game. They shared elements but they were different concepts. Literally, that game was about survival and tower defence, while this one is about exploring and not fearing the dangers hiding around the corners of the world. That's why, based on what people have seen so far, it's a very colourful and light world, but the deeper you dig – just like life – the world is not a perfect theme park."

The elements that the two games share – outside of the island and tower – have now all largely been removed. Some sounded like interesting ideas, such »





CHILDLIKE INNOCENCE

Rime may have a beautiful world, intuitive puzzle design and an incredible sense of place, but it also feels fragile. You never feel safe or content, eager to move on for mysteries lurk behind the still statues and distant horizons. That's because of the lead protagonist, an eight-year-old boy that brings the game's separate elements together.

"You're this child – this eight-year-old kid – you cannot feel as if you are the hero who is saving the world. We wanted the kid to feel fragile. You are supposed to be helpless," says Tequila Works' CEO Raúl Rubio, citing this as the reason *Rime* doesn't feature any combat.

One of the biggest achievements here is the way the kid moves and interacts with the world. It feels authentic, reflecting how you remember games such as *Ico* and *Shadow Of The Colossus* handled back in the day. The studio notes that it once had a "super fluid" animation system in place, leaning on the floaty but haphazard system seen in *Another World*, but that it ultimately gave way to something that felt more comfortable and responsive to wield.

"We paid a lot of attention to games like *Jak & Daxter* and *Shadow Of The Colossus*, because we wanted to show that clunkiness. You are supposed to be an eight-year-old kid. But as we kept moving through development, there was a conflict. It was beautiful to look at – we had these super fluid animations, but we are not Naughty Dog. In order to achieve a fluid and immediate response in the animations you need a lot of short blends in the animation – very short animations that blend in any situation [so you can move smoothly between running and jumping and turning, etc]. It looked nice but it was frustrating."

"The result is maybe it isn't as beautiful now as it was, but the beauty that you lose is something you gain in terms of control response. I think that's something that players value far more. We have kept the feeling of being a child, but the animators are maybe not as happy because the animations are not as good as they wanted, but I don't think anybody is going to get mad playing *Rime* now because of this."

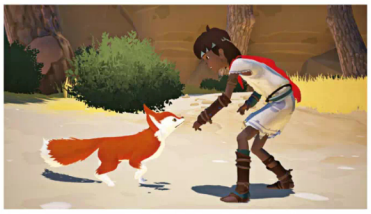
The original working title for *Rime* was *Siren*, but it was already taken and so Tequila went back to the drawing board. It settled on *Rime*, drawing on the works of 'Rime Of The Ancient Mariner'. It isn't clear whether they meant the 18th century poem or the Iron Maiden song.

Rime feels standalone to anything else out there in the indie scene, though it best recalls fond memories of playing *Journey* for the first time.

> Steam saved our ass. It was the combination of Deadlight and Steam

as a "super complex spoken system, where you could talk and you could scream." While this action is now contextual, back in its PS4-exclusivity days, *Rime* was to make full use of the imminently arriving PS4's features. "Back in the day, you could even modulate your voice with the touch pad [on a PS4 controller] and create songs; that was fun, but it was super complex and really hard to master. We wanted something that was far simpler... and so [we] experimented"

We heard plenty of stories like this while we were with the team, and you can see it ricocheting all throughout the design. Some were as simple as sticks being removed from the island, Rubio tells us, because "if we started adding items that can be used as weapons well the next step is giving you a sword. You are supposed to be helpless... it was interesting but it added a lot of complexity [and] that didn't really benefit the game." While other elements from the *Osiris* vision were simply cut away as Tequila found its feet with *Rime* as a project. "[As] for the survival elements; yeah okay, you are stranded on an island and one designer would say that one of the mechanics is that you need to eat and find water to survive. Well first, *Don't Starve* was released and we said that we [were] not going to do something as good as this, at all!" Rubio once again laughs, adding, "and second, this is distracting us from the kind of experience that we want to have in the first place, so lets remove it."











All of this, from the outside looking in, sounds pretty chaotic. But the reality of the situation is that *Rime* needed the extra development time, away from the spotlight, to really find its purpose and discover its soul. After walking away we were desperate to dig further into its world, and to uncover its hidden mysteries. There's a playful innocence to it we have rarely seen achieved with such poignancy and clarity. In May, the years of waiting will come to an end. PS4, Switch and Xbox One players will all be able to take part in this adventure, and – if our time with the game is any indication – each one of them will walk away with a different impression. After almost four years of waiting, Tequila Works' mesmerising adventure game will finally be yours to enjoy, a fact that clearly delights the studio.

"We are [finally] free to talk, to tell people what we have being doing all of these years. That's probably been the hardest part. Not because we have had to keep secrets, that isn't a big deal, but as an artist you want always to share your creations; working in this creative environment that's the object of what we want to do."

"Now we are finally seeing the light at the end of the tunnel," Rubio says with a sigh of relief. "This was a project that we all wanted to do, this was very personal for the studio and being able to be there for all of the journey has been quite an adventure."

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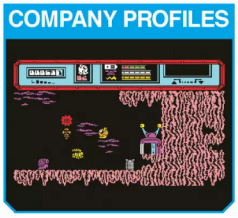
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Horizon: Zero Dawn

Welcome to the robopocalypse

PS4

The fact that Guerrilla has never made a role-playing game before is really the source of *Horizon: Zero Dawn*'s greatest strengths and greatest weaknesses. The Dutch studio has been able to shed decades of accumulated baggage from the genre, striking out in interesting and engaging new directions, but it has also shown its lack of experience and full depth of understanding. The result is a game that is gorgeous and superbly made in many areas, but which lacks a few finer details that would make it truly exceptional.

The eye-catching element of *Horizon*'s design is thankfully also one of its best; the machines are a delight to test yourself against. The escalation of the machine threat through the game is very nicely done as you work your way from the small Watchers and their agile leaping attacks to the Behemoths and their lumbering, multi-faceted attack patterns. The game is always keeping you on your toes as each new machine is introduced. At first we did everything we could to avoid the Watchers and Striders, relying on patches of long grasses and tracking their patrol patterns for our chance to dash to another piece of cover, but through levelling up, stronger weapons and new skills like overriding the machine AI to work for us, the Watchers and Striders create less and less concern. And as soon as one older machine feels dealt with, another is introduced with a completely different degree of threat, attack strength, weakness and in different numbers and combinations.

And then you actually have to fight them, because sneaking around them might get you from place to place, but facing the machines is your fastest route to progress. Their intricate design that allows components, even their weapon systems, to be detached (sometimes even picked up and used against them) offers so many different tactical approaches. Do you take out the weapons of the biggest, meanest machine and then pick off the smaller enemies or stealth attack everyone on the periphery before going all-out on the giant? Do you lean on your bow or mix things up with traps, tripwires and other distractions?

The tactical depth of your combat approach speaks to a developer not bogged down in the lineage of RPG design, but rather has been forged in the kiln of action games. Some of the combat areas of the game, from bandit camps to natural rock formations that contain the battle, would be as good in a FPS game as they are here. You'll find you have multiple options for entering areas, different vantage points and lots of chances to sneak or face your opponent head-on, whether robot or human.

We played through the game in a largely stealth-focused manner, which the game caters for beautifully. If you tend towards sniper rifles and stealth kills in *Fallout* or like playing rogue characters in other RPGs, *Horizon* was made for you. If fast-paced, hectic action is your thing, *Horizon* can sometimes feel like a sci-fi version of *Monster Hunter* as you roll, duck and dodge away from machines before catching their one weak spot, but it doesn't offer quite the same depth. As you get further into the game, some weapons and upgrades become available to you that might allow for a more head-on approach, but they can take some getting to.

Ultimately, we can't think of another RPG in which we actually felt compelled to use all of the tools at our disposal to complete the game. The bow and spear will get you through most scenarios, but with bigger bandit camps and larger machines, setting traps and luring enemies is not only very satisfying, but also pretty much essential. We didn't touch the traps for a third of the game and then they became a massive part of our combat strategy right to the end. Similarly the options that protected against elemental effects, applying the right upgrades to armour and weapons, all became an important element of our strategy as things became more strategically complex.

We probably all expected that Guerrilla would provide a more action-orientated approach to RPG game structure than the likes of *The Witcher III* or *Fallout* and that's exactly how things have played out. *Horizon* straddles the divide between action game and RPG, perhaps more so than even *The Legend Of Zelda*. In the opening parts of the game, so focused and directed is the experience, it can feel a lot more like an open-world action game in the vein of the *Arkham* series. Missions come slowly and you'll notice that whole sections of your log remain greyed out as you gradually play through the opening hours of story. However, once you leave the Embrace (the game's opening area) and side-quests begin to populate your mission log, that all falls away. What that heavily directed opening actually gives you is a narrative and emotional launch pad from which to propel Aloy through the rest of the game, and possibly even beyond.



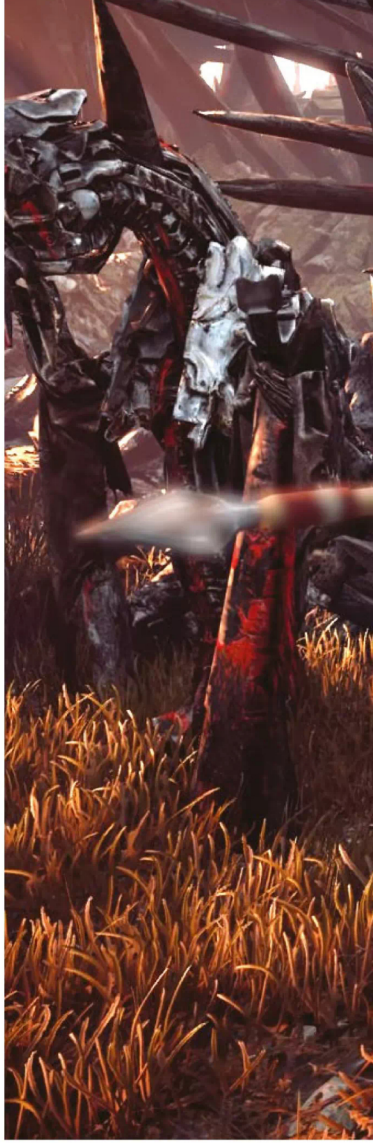
DETAILS

PUBLISHER
Sony Interactive Entertainment

DEVELOPER
Guerrilla Games

PSN PRICE
£49.99

PLAYERS
1





△○×□ ***Horizon*'s world design falls somewhere nicely between *Fallout* and *The Witcher*, full of lush, green nature and then suddenly the signs of a once great and dominant civilisation appear before you. It reminded us a little of Ninja Theory's *Enslaved* at times.**

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"THE TACTICAL DEPTH OF YOU COMBAT APPROACH SPEAKS TO A DEVELOPER NOT BOGGED DOWN IN THE LINEAGE OF RPG DESIGN"





△○×□ The bow combat at first may feel a little slow and lumbering against such nimble and mobile machines, but as you level up your skills and purchase better bows, you'll likely find it to be a more than effective weapon for precision combat.

HUD HEAVY

We personally found the amount of HUD furniture to be a little heavy handed on its default setting, cluttering up the screen with information and notifications, but thankfully this can all be customised. Every element of the heads-up display can be turned off completely and all elements, save for the compass at the top of the screen, can be switched to a dynamic setting that only activates when you're in battle or start moving items around with the D-pad. Given how gorgeous some of the world design is and how good it looks on a 4K screen, we highly recommend switching to a dynamic HUD setting once you feel that you've learnt everything it has to teach you.

△○×□ Getting to the top of a Tallneck is just as enjoyable as you might imagine. The climb itself is pretty simple, with none of the challenge of something like *Shadow Of The Colossus* if you suspected that.





△○×□ Mounts become an important part of navigating the map, not just to speed things up, but to keep clear of machines. The level balance of the map can change wildly as a mission advising at least level 15 might take you through regions with level 25-plus enemies. Just keep running.

BETTER IN 4K?

We've called *Horizon* the PS4 Pro's champion, so it is only right that we should test it extensively on a 4K, HDR-enabled TV to see if it holds up, and thankfully for everyone involved, it does. Guerrilla's reputation for making highly polished, graphically impressive experiences remains intact, with some particularly good work to be seen in the facial animation and performance capture. But it's out in the open world with the sparks flying and pieces of the machines clattering to the floor during battle that the real quality of this game in 4K shines through. Is it worth upgrading to play? We're still not sure about that and we should add that having played it on an older model PS4 on a standard HD TV, it plays beautifully and we encountered no technical issues.



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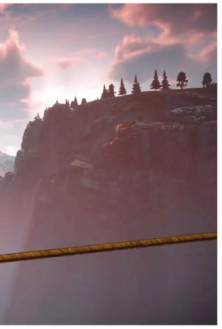




And we have to say, we love Aloy a lot. Her tone manages to play nicely between scepticism and wonder. Having grown up as an outcast from her tribe she carries none of their superstitions, none of their prejudices, but also none of their experience. The world you enter then is as new to her as it is to you. And her personality, while you can nudge it in certain directions from time to time, feels very defined as one of compassion, empathy and determination. Aloy won't stand for condescension, she won't suffer fools and she has no time for mysticism covering self-interest. However, she seems to respect the cultures and traditions of the people she meets even if she doesn't hold to them. It's a tough balancing act, but one that voice actress Ashly Burch (who also voiced Chloe Price in *Life Is Strange*) does superbly.

"ALOY WON'T STAND FOR CONDESCENSION, SHE WON'T SUFFER FOOLS AND SHE HAS NO TIME FOR MYSTICISM COVERING SELF-INTEREST"





In fact, the voice acting and performances on the whole in this game are pretty good. There are some standout characters who manage to come across as very genuine people in an extraordinary world and others that perhaps fall into the hammier camp of post-apocalyptic fiction. The main story cast and most of the supporting characters are excellent as it's only really the lower-level NPCs and occasional day-player who breaks the immersion with over-enunciation or weaker performances.

When it's not great though its failings aren't helped by some mixed sound design implementation. Again, on the whole the game is very good in the sound department with a lot of good performances, as mentioned, and some fantastic music. However, the sound levels can be off when quest NPCs shout across the map to you for help and you can't even see them. Their voices travel across the plains lacking atmosphere or depth and they repeat the same lines over and over. Some similar repetition can be found in villages and towns with merchants and citizens offering little variety, even talking over one another so you can't make out a word they're saying. This isn't uncommon for a game of this type, but it stands out as weak against such great accomplishments elsewhere in the game.

By comparison the machine and animal sound effects in the game and the way they are introduced as background noise to make you aware of their presence even when you can't immediately get a line of sight on them is excellent. Half of the *Horizon* experience is about being aware at all times where machines might be lurking or patrolling and the audio design is a massive part of that. So, having an element of the sound design stand out like a sore thumb breaks that immersion, and frankly it's a compliment to everything else in *Horizon* that it's only at this level that things feel like more time and experience might have helped the developer get more from the game.

The higher-level gameplay then, for the most part, is excellent so it is in the smaller details that we find *Horizon*'s inconsistency. It has moments and areas where it does superbly well at capturing the little details just right and others where it fails completely. Some of the animation, for instance Aloy's jumping, isn't as fluid or naturalistic as other elements of the game. Some of the facial animation of lesser NPCs isn't great and the character models have a tendency to flail around a little without really being tied down to the words being spoken. And while much of the combat design is excellent, mapping traps, potions and health to the d-pad is a slightly fiddly choice that can be aggravating to play with in the heat of battle. A tough compromise for mapping so much to the DualShock 4 controller.

That said, it gets a lot of other lesser-appreciated elements right. The music in the game is excellent, marrying sweeping orchestral pieces and tribal drums with electronic stings that punctuate the peace much as the machines do the landscape reclaimed by nature. The escalation of combat and its increasing complexity are excellent, and on-the-fly crafting brings added tension and immediacy to battles. And we'd like to compliment the fast travel system too, which starts off as a limited feature based on how many packs you can carry and becomes limitless when you pick up the right upgrade. As missions start sending you from one side of the world to the other, it saves a lot of headaches.

The story is so wrapped up in mystery and discovery that we don't want to get into any details in this review. Suffice to say that while it can feel a little derivative in places (a shortcoming that could be levelled at several areas of the game, but is somewhat expected for a first-time RPG maker), it is driven by a compelling world that gradually reveals itself to you. Discovering how civilisation was lost and how the machines rose are weaved nicely into Aloy's search for her own origin and hero's journey. What's more, the main story campaign is supplemented by some meaty side-quests that can often be as involved and varied as the main narrative. While Errands, Bandit Camps, Corrupted Zones, Hunting Grounds and Cauldrons (amazing sci-fi dungeons) bulk out the rest of the game with varying lengths of challenge or distractions depending on what you're looking for. While it's a lot of fetch quests and investigations that rely on Aloy's tracking skills and technology, the game world itself has enough variety and the machines add enough of a twist to keep them interesting.

This generation has been blessed by some excellent RPG and action-adventure offerings so far and while *Horizon: Zero Dawn* sometimes shows its team's relative inexperience in places and some small annoyances from time to time, the overall construction, the combat and the character of Aloy elevate it into the upper echelons of the genre. It may not be quite on a *Witcher III* level of excellence, but for a first attempt from Guerrilla, it's impressively close.

VERDICT

A stunning open world debut for Guerrilla

9/10

Resident Evil VII

A mansion in the darkness



DETAILS

PUBLISHER
Capcom

DEVELOPER
In-house

PSN PRICE
£49.99

PLAYERS
1

PS4

The best scares should leave a scar. A permanent mark that follows you. It should serve to remind you of dangers that lurk in the night, that force you to fear the shadows of your soul and turn from flickering lights that dance in the dark. The best scares should leave a scar, because anything less is but a cheap parlour trick; in this respect, *Resident Evil VII* cuts deep. It brands itself into your very being, playing on the fallacy of your basic instincts and the predictability of your fears. It does this to create an atmosphere of unwavering terror; the kind that stirs you from your sleep, the kind that makes your skin crawl when you're searching for the light, the kind that makes you believe that somebody – or something – is always there. *Resident Evil VII*'s scares leave a scar, and they aren't necessarily physical, although we suppose when you factor in PlayStation VR, anything is possible.

Resident Evil VII is a technical masterpiece. A true return to the roots of survival-horror, cut from the same cloth as the original *Resident Evil* and the archetypal *Sweet Home*. That isn't to say, however, that *VII*'s ambitions are defined merely by what has come before it, and that's because Capcom has been able to leverage what made its earliest ventures into horror so effective and modernised them, evolving the entire experience to feel fresh and – most integrally – dangerous.

Can you recall the last time you felt physically threatened by a videogame? Perhaps it was within *PT*'s oppressive chamber of terror; maybe it was within the combat-less constructs of *Amnesia: The Dark Descent* and *Outlast*, or even the haunting shopping centres of *Condemned: Criminal Origins*. While these are all fine examples – games effective at manipulating the emotions of the player – few leave their mark in quite the same way as *Resident Evil VII*.

This perceived sense of danger is born from the simplest shift: *Resident Evil VII* is the first numbered game in the series to be played from a first-person camera perspective. While this has been the source of some amount of controversy, *Resident Evil* has been no stranger to perspective shifts in the past. From the static third-person cameras of decades gone by, to the over-the-shoulder angles designed to enhance action and emphasise speed in the more recent releases, *Resident Evil* has (to varying degrees of success) always found a way to shift its basic design pillars in service of advancing its various gameplay ambitions.

In many respects, *Resident Evil VII* can be considered a success to the same extent as *Resident Evil 4*, then. It has set a new standard, taking the relatively limited, quieter independent experiences found within *Amnesia* and *Outlast* and given them the triple-A treatment; expanding the claustrophobic corridors of the former out into a sprawling, interconnected gameplay space and expanded expertly on the latter's found-footage theme into a central, dizzying original twist on core narrative convention.

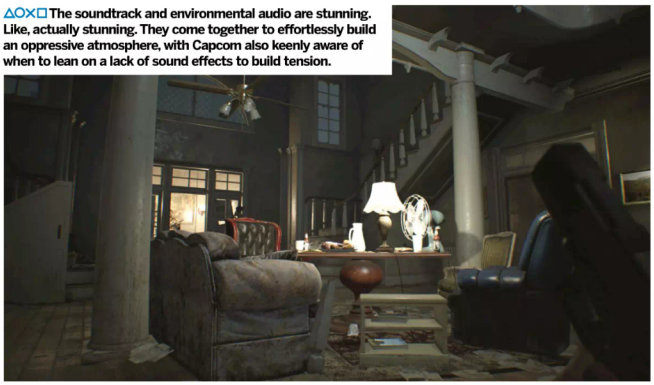
The genius of the first-person camera is that it limits the perspective. There's a reason Capcom left the static camera behind at the turn of the century, and that's because it ultimately limited what the studio would be able to achieve in an age of ever-advancing game engines, evolving art principles and design techniques. In practice, the switch to first-person achieves the same effect and purpose of the original camera without immediately dating the experience.

It's a different flavour, but it works to build fear and loathing in Dulvey, Louisiana. Turning speed is purposefully slow, working to close

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"IN MANY RESPECTS, RESIDENT EVIL VII CAN BE CONSIDERED A SUCCESS TO THE SAME EXTENT AS RESIDENT EVIL 4"



△○×□ **The soundtrack and environmental audio are stunning. Like, actually stunning. They come together to effortlessly build an oppressive atmosphere, with Capcom also keenly aware of when to lean on a lack of sound effects to build tension.**



down your capabilities and turn up the tension as you methodically stalk through the Baker Estate's many claustrophobic corridors and crawlspaces. In *VII*, so effective is the unwavering, uncomfortable sense of dread that you are never certain that an enemy hasn't crawled into the room behind you. Never are you 100 per cent certain that a shambling terror isn't about to claw at you from the shadows or begin to stalk you from around a grimly lit corner.

Remember back to the original *Resi*, and how it bred caution by obscuring sections of any given room – ensuring that you were never certain that something horrible wasn't lurking just out of sight – and then consider how *VII* echoes this expertly. Capcom may have gone first-person, but it has done so in a way that ultimately pays respects to its heritage, building a theme of tension all throughout its basic design, and in a way that we thought *Resident Evil* had long left behind.

We mentioned the idea of *Resident Evil VII* closing down your capabilities before, and that's integral to the overall feel and pace of this 12-or-so hour game. Despite being set after *Resident Evil 6*, you don't inhabit the body of a former STARS agent, undercover operative or, seemingly, anybody of any note. By putting you into the shoes of everyman Ethan Winters, *Resident Evil* is able to start afresh.

While we could quite easily spend a few more hours trying to work out how tenuously (or perfectly, depending on the quality and content of the upcoming DLC) *VII* ties in to the overall *Resident Evil* timeline, this is (to all intents and purposes) a clean slate. You don't need to have any investment in the 20 years of twisting idiocy that is the *Resident Evil* backstory; there are plenty of fan-service environmental nods, a handful of purposefully (classically) obtuse puzzles, hidden notes and dated references that tie it all together, but the insanity of *Resident Evil*'s continuity, by and large, exists on the periphery.

And yet, still it is able to feel like a quintessential *Resident Evil* experience. Tone and pacing play as much of a part in fostering that feeling as combat and cameras, something *VII* achieves almost effortlessly. Winters is a dry and often sarcastic protagonist, bringing an air of awkward humour to the terrible events unfolding around him in an effort to break some of the tension – a breath of fresh air, as fleeting as it may be. The pace of the gameplay – whether you are creeping to avoid detection from stalking antagonists or pumping screeching creatures full of a dwindling supply of ammunition – is often slow and tense, and there is rarely any escape from the monsters that reside in this mansion in the dark. Running is as good a tactic as any in your desperate attempt to survive.

As pretentious as it may be to claim, the mansion is perhaps the best character in *VII*. The Baker Estate doesn't just feel lived in, but it feels alive. Within its walls you will be made to feel helpless, it will manipulate your actions and your movements, with subtle environmental cues willing you deeper into its depths. It is, in essence, the Spencer Mansion reborn, albeit on a smaller scale. You'll spend much of the game here, exploring the Baker family's residence, becoming intimate with its twisting corridors and web of shortcuts. Enemies, from the Bakers themselves to a limited array of other mutating antagonists, take residence here, alongside an ever-lingering evil that's far scarier than any immediate threat you may encounter.

Outside the mansion's walls, you'll be able to explore the surrounding area – a *Saw*-inspired torture room, a creepy greenhouse and a decaying house on the edge of the Louisiana Bayou and, later... you know what, we wouldn't dare ruin the surprise. But you'll always return to the house, either by design or intuition. It's full of lore to consume, secret puzzles to uncover hidden deeply in its labyrinth, and only by scouring every corner of the house, will you find the necessary items to keep your backpack stocked and uncover new weapons, items and upgrades.

"YOU DON'T NEED TO HAVE ANY INVESTMENT IN THE TWISTING IDIOCY THAT IS THE RESIDENT EVIL BACKSTORY"



In true *Resident Evil* style, resources are limited. Your backpack has limited space to store items, saving is limited to infrequent safe rooms. Healing items and ammunition are also limited. So too are your capabilities in combat. Every single weapon you acquire in *Resident Evil VII* feels different. As we mentioned before, Ethan is no STARS agent, and that means his proficiency



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△○×□ Madhouse difficulty is unlocked after you complete the game, changing the location of items and enemies, ramping up the difficulty and forcing you to find hidden cassettes to save.





△○×□ ***Resident Evil VII*** **features odd emergent elements, such as the capacity to have your limbs sliced off in the heat of combat, with just a small window existing for you to reattach them before bleeding out.**



RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

In classic *Resident Evil* fashion, you'll spend a good amount of time managing your resources. It's such a small, but ultimately integral way of building tension and panic. Items are limited – as too is bag space, upgraded should you find larger hidden backpacks – and that means you'll need to be constantly looking to combine items. Though that is, in fact, a source of stress in itself; do you take the Green Herb immediately for a needed boost of health, or wait for the necessary chemicals to turn it into a larger health kit? *Resident Evil VII* is a constant struggle between these kinds of decisions and it's wonderfully engaging.

with firearms is reduced, reflecting his position as a citizen that has stumbled unknowingly into a warped hellscape. There's a deliberate wobble to the way in which he handles himself when wielding a weapon. Again, in a nod to classic *Resi*, the best tactic and flow to combat is to gain some distance on your assailant, swivel 180 degrees, plant your feet and hope you don't miss those all-important headshots.

While *VII* does suffer from a critical lack of enemy variation, pitting you against the same family members – often in the form of ridiculous, lovingly-crafted boss battles – and just a handful of Molded enemy types time and time again, the aggressive AI systems more than make up for it. Game difficulty scales reactively in a similar fashion to that of *Resident Evil 4*, ensuring that you are rarely able to slip into a position of comfort or feel over-encumbered with items and ammunition – finding yourself forever on the back heel, hoping you can make every shot count, is exhaustingly exhilarating.

That's due, in large part, to the weapons feeling so damned liberating. After hours of being relentlessly pursued, blasting an enemy with a shotgun tends to be relatively cathartic. The monsters recoil and twist in pain when your shots connect – it has a clear and visible impact – and if headshots aren't working for you in a blind panic, you could always try dismemberment, which *always* has a way of achieving the intended results.

In many respects, *VII* feels like a microcosm of everything Capcom has attempted to do with the franchise over the last two decades, distilling down the series' core elements into one frightfully engaging package. The game morphs around you as you move deeper into its web, exchanging fragility for fleeting moments of empowerment, bewilderment and confusion with colour-coded keycards, and puzzle-solving, and it does it all within one perfectly designed and brilliantly executed interwoven game space. *Resident Evil VII* plays with a tenuous balance, shifting between power and fragility, action and stealth effortlessly, achieving its ambitions almost flawlessly – never outstaying its welcome, relentlessly pushing you forward while still giving you enough agency to backtrack and breathe when it needs to.

Resident Evil VII is exhilarating and terrifying in equal measure. It's a brave and bold move for Capcom, feeling quintessentially classic while still feeling fresh and adventurous in its ambitions. Ultimately, *Resident Evil VII* is a breathtaking return to form for a series we long thought had abandoned any hope of redemption. *Resi* is back at last.

VERDICT

A breathtaking return to form

9/10


20488





△○×□ We're not sure what this is – a lightning, tiger, monkey, man thing?

Nioh

Soul of a Samurai



DETAILS

PUBLISHER
Sony Interactive Entertainment

DEVELOPER
Team Ninja

PSN PRICE
£49.99

PLAYERS
1

PS4

***Nioh* opens with a pastiche of *Dark Souls'* opening level, with knights and longswords in tow, however after these opening moments the game evolves into something completely its own.** The colourful setting of Feudal Japan explores a side of history that we don't often get to see in big-budget games, save for *Samurai Warriors* from Omega Force. This unique art-style and areas are what give *Nioh* its own identity. The levels we find ourselves in are incredibly well thought out, with a level of detail that is scarcely found in many other similar games.

However, *Nioh* doesn't adopt the open interconnected world of its Medieval European cousin. Instead, the game takes on a mission-based structure, with you taking on new missions in addition to 'Twilight Missions' which are harder levels set in areas we've already played with more difficult enemies. These are selected on a world map with a 'Mission Hub' - there's no place of respite in *Nioh* aside from this menu, so not making it a small area with NPC is disappointing, as you never really feel as if you're a real part of the world without such a proper, interactive hub.



△○×□ Stances are not only useful in combat, but also look pretty cool.

While you'll often find yourself hacking away at ordinary men to begin with, *Nioh* quickly switches it up by putting players to the task of defeating Yokai; huge demons that are inspired by Japanese mythology. This creature design is also echoed in the design of the bosses, which are brutally difficult to battle.

Combat itself is based around your health and stamina bar. Like *Monster Hunter* and *Dark Souls* before it, whenever you attack, you commit to the animation, so rushing in is going to get you nowhere against even the weakest enemies. Where *Nioh* sets itself apart is the speed of the combat, with a wide range of weapons like Dual Katanas and Hammers at your disposal, there's a wealth of options to play around with.

Each weapon also has its own stances, letting you switch between light, medium and heavy options. This gives combat an unprecedented depth. Aided by the character upgrade system, we see Team Ninja's roots in *Ninja Gaiden* influence *Nioh*. You're able to customise skills and upgrade your abilities to create the optimal build for your character.

Nioh is incredibly difficult, even seasoned veterans of *Bloodborne* and the *Souls* series are not in for an easy ride. The 'Ki Purification' system has you replenishing your stamina bar instantly when timing a button-press correctly, but is very difficult to master when dashing in and around enemies trying not to get stabbed to bits.

While it takes heavy influence from other titles, *Nioh* is undoubtedly exactly what the genre needs – a fresh take on systems that players love with the extra added dash of fast combat and excellent monster design.

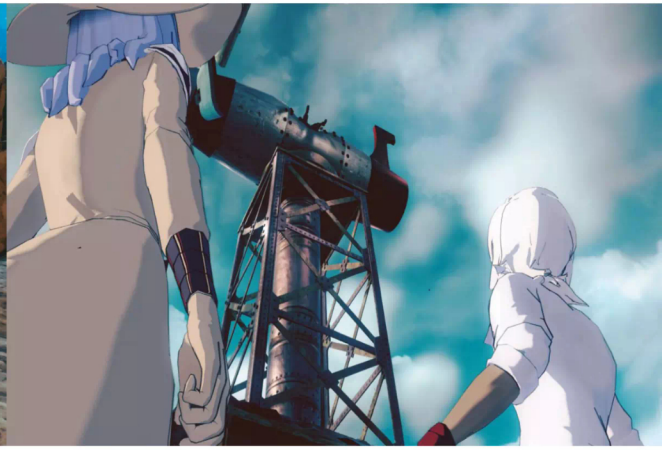
VERDICT

Challenging, beautiful and unique

8/10

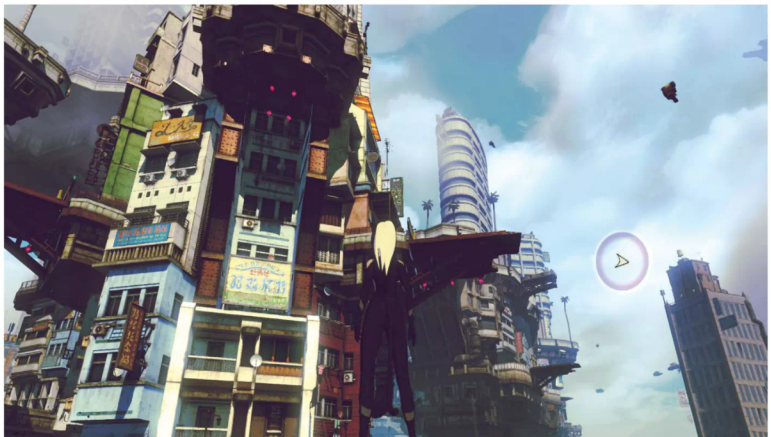
△○×□ Landscapes in *Gravity Rush 2* can range dramatically, but each one is rendered with impressively artistic palettes. Even here in the underworld mining zone, the mucky browns are merely a carrier from the pops of pink and green. It's always a dramatic aesthetic.





GRAVITY RUSH 3?

Although no words have been spoken yet about a third *Gravity Rush* game, there's more than enough here to denote a sequel. Not only does the ending leave some things up in the air – no spoilers – there are enough recurring characters and places to make this a series for years to come. Whether it's the unique gameplay elements, our feline-focused heroine or the gorgeous art style, here's a PS4 exclusive that really stands out and doesn't get the attention that it deserves. It may even be that *Gravity Rush 3* lets us play a time as Raven, pulling a bit of a *Dishonored 2* with two playable protagonists.



Gravity Rush 2

Turning your world upside down





DETAILS

PUBLISHER
Sony Computer Entertainment

DEVELOPER
Sony Japan Studio

PSN PRICE
£49.99

PLAYERS
1

PS4

***Gravity Rush 2* starts off as an excellent, imaginative sequel to one of the PS Vita's best titles, but it eventually evolves into a complex, colourful and utterly involving game that is one of the first sparkling gems of 2017.**

Our gravity-defying heroine, Kat, is back, and although at first she's stripped of her powers – and her cat – she soon is back on form and more powerful than ever. The story starts out with you stranded far from the familiar world of Hekseville from the first game, on a mining boat with a nomadic troop who don't seem to be very friendly to Kat or Syd.

You'd be forgiven for thinking kicking the crud out of glowing balls to mine crystals isn't the *Gravity Rush* you know and love. It's not, but it's only temporary. As soon as you meet the first Nevi – the evil glowing beasts that plagued the first game – Dusty the cat is back, as are your basic gravitational powers.

It's not until the game takes you to the main city hub of Jirga Para Lhao that things really get interesting. It takes Hekseville and makes everything bigger, better, brighter and far more interesting. Heck, it's even got a message on class, with the rich occupying gigantic mansions on the higher levels of the floating city, and the poor living in shanty towns on the lower tiers.

But ultimately, it's a massive world that's littered with a variety of side-quests, challenges and story missions that will keep you busy way past the 20 hour mark, and hooked for longer – these extras are more than mere distractions.

Kat's relationship with the mining folk of Banga builds when she saves them from the Nevi, so to begin with you're merely doing their bidding, fixing trade issues and rescuing their mined ore from the hands of nasty people.

But soon these troubles become embroiled in the class wars of Jirga Para Lhao at large, and Kat finds herself fighting for the lower classes taking on roles from revolutionary or jazz singer, to investigative reporter and reluctant servant-turned-rebel.

And that's just the main missions, too. It's easy to get distracted by the vast amount of side-quests you'll come across throughout Jirga Para Lhao, which feature reoccurring colourful characters, such as a writer with a little too much imagination, a rubbish delivery man who'll have you carrying packages across the city even if they stink so much you occasionally pass out.

Gravity Rush 2 quickly has far more gameplay content to offer than its predecessor, especially when you chuck in the various challenges such as time trials and scavenger hunts. It's incredibly difficult to find yourself bored in this town.

Frustration, though, can occur quite frequently. Kat's gravitational powers may have evolved for *Gravity Rush 2*, but the camera controls and enemy targeting can regularly leave you wanting to hurl your controller through the screen, especially in the later boss battles where precise timing and aim are crucial.

There are also strange new stealth sections where doing anything involving gravity manipulation is an incredibly annoying instant fail.

But thankfully, *Gravity Rush 2*'s gameplay has plenty to distract you from the irritations. Not only does it have the beauty and quirky elegance of a watercolour painting, there are also new gameplay features that make this the better of the two *Gravity Rush* titles.

If you've played the original *Gravity Rush*, you'll be familiar at first with Kat's gravitational powers. It's a simple tap of R1 to hover, aiming and then hitting R2 to send her flying through the air. You can even hit L2 for a gravity-powered ground slide, Square for a mid-air kick, or gather up the city's debris to use as projectiles.

But unlike the original *Gravity Rush*, it doesn't stop there. You might feel close to mastering Kat's powers by mid-way through the game, but it's then that the game really ramps up a notch, introducing entire new sets of moves one after another.

Lunar Style makes Kat lighter, faster and capable of long-distance jumps, while Jupiter Style is conversely focused on close-quarters combat, physical power and serious strength, effectively increasing gravity so Kat can move with greater force.

Combining these two and the classic Normal Style makes for some interesting combat techniques, balancing each ones advantages, limitations, special moves and movement styles. Suddenly *Gravity Rush 2*'s combat becomes an excellent mix of tactics, switching between abilities with a swipe of the touchpad and working out how to use your newfound powers.

It's really impressive just how much *Gravity Rush 2* manages to keep you on your toes, whether we're talking about the gameplay or the storyline. The tale may seem very predictable, but just like the gameplay, it will keep evolving and continuing just when you think – but not hope – the credits will be rolling.

You will be thrown into different scenarios, meet new characters and even a few old faces, but more importantly be constantly kept entertained and wanting more. Cinematic moments are done impressively well, the music swells and crests like you've got a live orchestra accompanying your gameplay and there is even a silly little selfie-focused mini-game that strays into creepy territory, just to keep you even more on your toes.

Gravity Rush 2 never ceases to amaze, really. It dishes up the frenetic gravity-defying action from the first game, but adds in several new layers that add a complexity to the gameplay that's refreshing and, although not necessarily needed, works incredibly well. This is a game that really does have its own brand of quirky complete justice and makes the most of its loveable heroine and stellar cast.



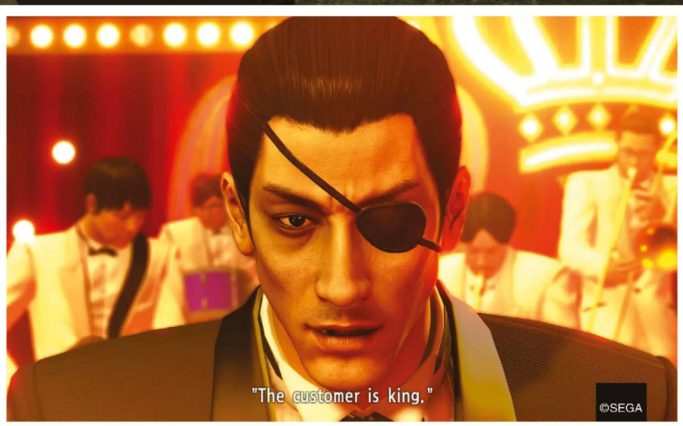
△○×□ **You really don't want to mess with one of Kat's finishing moves – they make her glow like this and look kind of crazy.**

VERDICT

Captivating stories blend well with new gravity powers

8/10

MR. SHAKEDOWN



Yakuza 0

Breaking the law



DETAILS

PUBLISHER
Sega

DEVELOPER
In-house

PSN PRICE
£39.99

PLAYERS
1-2 online

PS4

The streets of *Yakuza 0*'s Kamurocho are the definition of excess: teeming with hostess bars, aimless drunken salarymen and a complex criminal underworld that lies beneath it all. However, underneath the veneer of Japan's economic success of the Eighties is a game that has an incredible sense of humour and oodles of personality.

Yakuza has been a difficult series for new players, however *Yakuza 0* takes you back to the origins of its two most notorious characters, Kazuma Kiryu and Goro Majima. Kiryu finds himself tangled in a web of complex criminal conspiracy, with Majima managing an upmarket hostess bar in Osaka. It's a lengthy story mode that will take you at least 50 hours to finish, and many times that for 100 per cent.

The characters in *Yakuza 0* are quirky, with moments of humour such as a mini-game where you have to dodge punches from a drunk man simply to frustrate him. These types of quirks set the world's tone, with the main story taking a backseat to the absurd world. As you explore, you can pick up side-missions which can vary from beating up thugs for stealing a game from a young child, to breaking up a gang of schoolgirls selling their underwear to men who try to take advantage of them. There's no lack of these side-missions either, with many triggering cutscenes simply by walking past a random NPC.

As you explore Kamurocho and Sotenbori, you'll be sure to run into all manner of people wanting to pick a fight with you – and this is where *Yakuza 0*'s combat shines. You unlock a variety of fighting styles between characters and string combos together that make the game feel like a souped-up, *3D Streets Of Rage*. Each punch that you throw feels incredibly weighty and makes the combat feel satisfying. One of the biggest highlights is *Yakuza 0*'s over-the-top Heat moves, which can vary from pouring salt into someone's eyes to just straight up curbstomping them.

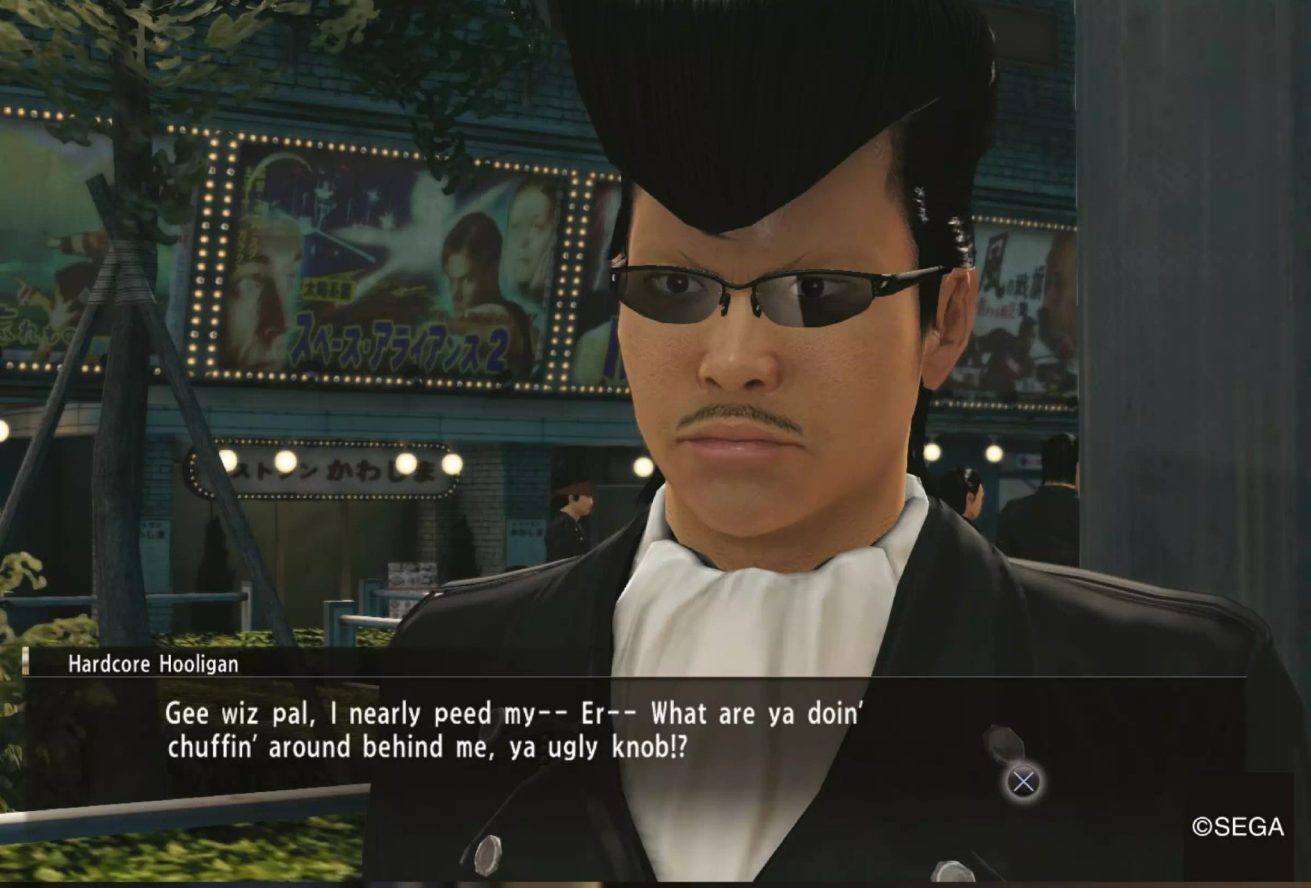
The world is brimming with detail, you can also participate in mini-games like trying your hand at karaoke, where *Yakuza 0* becomes a rhythm game for all of three minutes. Did we mention that there's a full version of *Space Harrier* to play when you walk into the arcade? There are an absurd amount of activities to distract yourself with should you get bored of knocking out thugs with bicycles. God forbid.

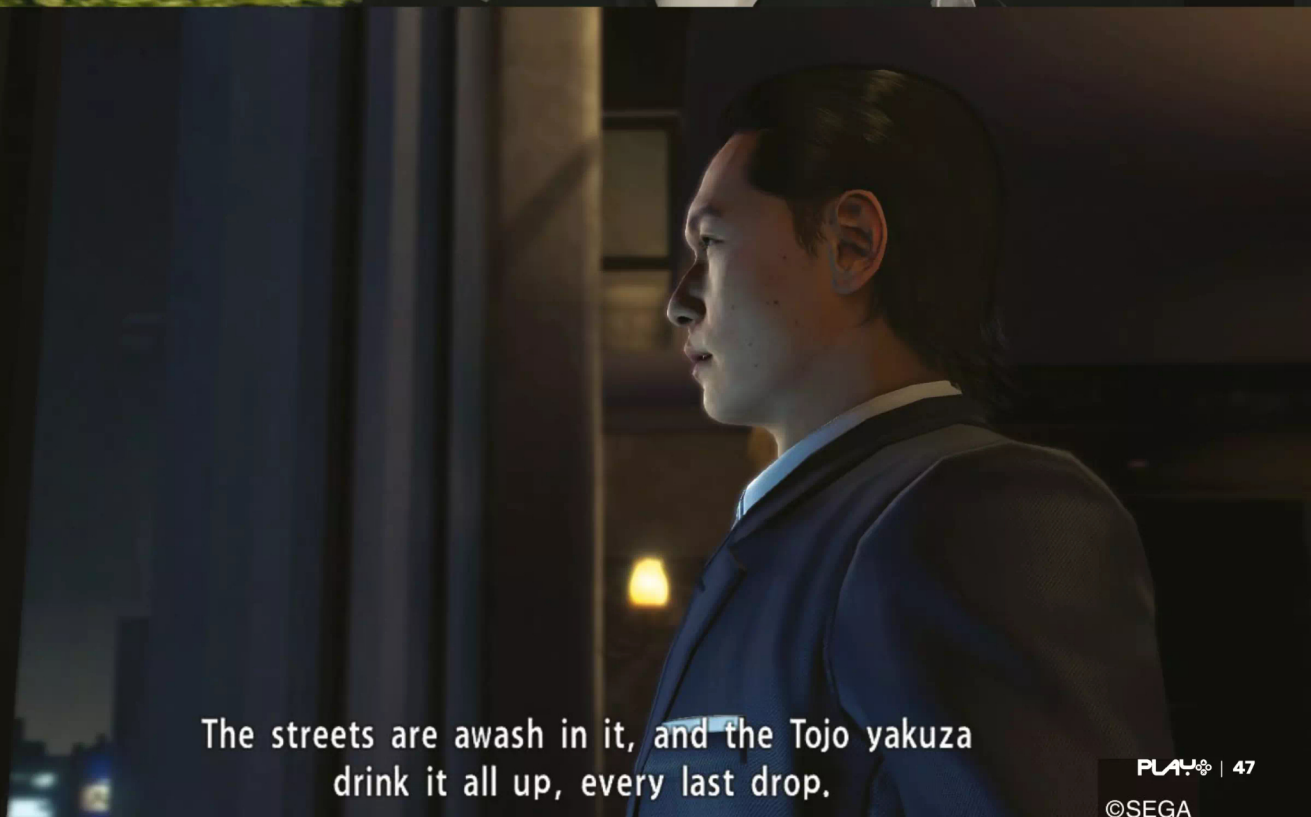
Yakuza 0 is a triumph of world design, and while it might not boast a massive map, the ones that are there are packed full of detail. Additionally, with the game serving as a prequel, it's also an excellent starting point for many new to the series.

VERDICT

One of the most detailed open worlds to date

9/10


Hardcore Hooligan
Gee wiz pal, I nearly peed my-- Er-- What are ya doin' chuffin' around behind me, ya ugly knob!?
©SEGA


The streets are awash in it, and the Tojo yakuza drink it all up, every last drop.
©SEGA

Tales Of Berseria

A return to form





PS4

It's been just over a year since Bandai Namco released the disappointing *Tales Of Zestiria*, and after a string of weak releases in the series, the long-running *Tales Of* series needs something drastic to shake it up. *Tales Of Berseria* takes all of the usual series tropes and subverts them with one key element: you're not playing as one of the good guys this time around.

Our story is centred around Velvet, who is driven by the trauma of her past, as well as being locked up in prison for three years. This is a pretty welcome change from the usual aloof male protagonist who always has the same backstory and origin. This archetype has been completely subverted for *Tales Of Berseria*. Velvet is fierce, strong and a charismatic leader for the range of loveable rejects you pick up along the way. The game tackles themes like becoming an outcast, belonging and learning to trust again in a way that the series has never really done before.

Additionally, the game keeps building upon a fun and satisfying battle system that has you building combos by customising which moves string into each other on each command. You're also able to play as any character in your party, meaning that if one particular character doesn't click with you, you're able to switch them out on the fly. The satisfying combat is the bread and butter in *Tales Of Berseria*, but the world that houses it is quite disappointing.

Despite the strength of the characters and battle system, one big hangover from previous games is that exploring the world doesn't amount to much aside from running around on a white map that's covered in snow. The generic fantasy style is almost exactly the same as any other JRPG on the market, there are no huge distinguishing features that really make it compelling. The later dungeons do become more visually interesting, but for most of the game the actual setting and locations are completely forgettable.

The real heart of *Tales Of Berseria* is the journey that you and your party go on featuring little character moments or 'skits' and your party will chat to each other about mundane inanities, but as you play the game, these moments build up to create one of the most memorable casts of characters that the decades-old series has seen.

Tales Of Berseria is a real return to form, and stands up on its own as a great traditional Japanese RPG as well as a good action game as a whole. With a fantastic combat system to rival even some action games, *Tales Of Berseria* has a way to go, but is the best entry to the series in years.

DETAILS

PUBLISHER
Bandai Namco Entertainment

DEVELOPER
In-house

PSN PRICE
£49.99

PLAYERS
1-4 (local)

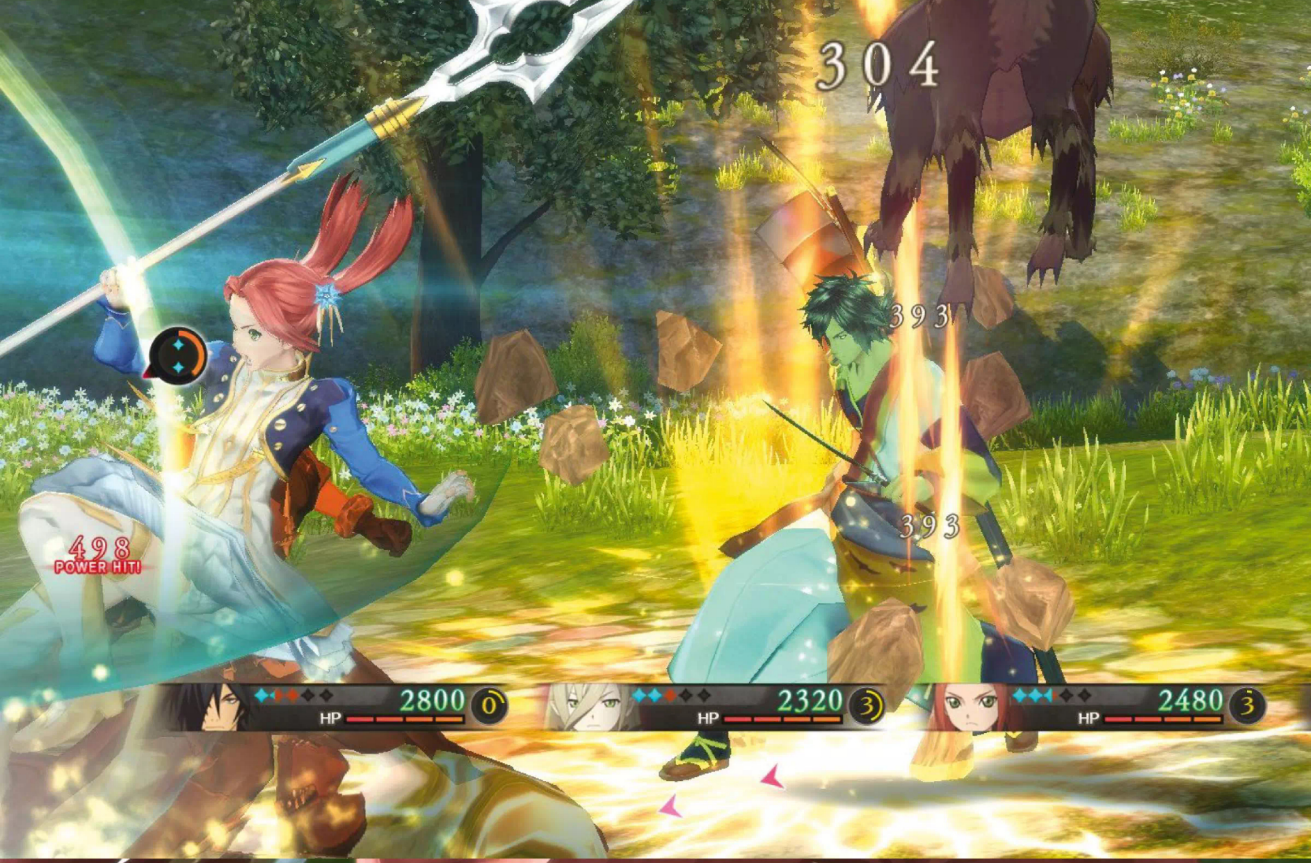
VERDICT

It's rarely been so good to be bad

7/10



△○×□ The battle system looks hectic, but is rooted in strategy.


304
393
393
498
POWER HIT!
HP
2800
0
HP
2320
3
HP
2480
3









Shantae: Half-Genie Hero

Enchanté!



DETAILS

PUBLISHER
WayForward Technologies

DEVELOPER
In-house

PSN PRICE
£15.99

PLAYERS
1

PS4

There's something to be said for a colourful game right now. As more and more titles move towards ultra-realistic visuals and a 4K resolution, it's refreshing to fire up *Shantae*'s latest adventure and be blown away by the cartoon-like appearance and whimsy that emanates from every pore.

This is a lovely platformer, then, that makes you smirk at the ridiculous nature of what you're seeing. The titular Shantae is, as you'd expect, half-genie (but all hero), and her idle animation is a sight to behold: it's a weird shimmy-cum-groovy-dance from side to side that's almost hypnotic, while the residents of her home are equally colourful and daft.

Despite developer WayForward's pedigree for games involving jumping, *Shantae* actually has something of Metroidvania about it. The levels seem straightforward at first, asking you to run from left to right, hit enemies, collect their gems (the currency you need to spend in the shop) and beat a boss at the end – as you'd expect from the genre.

It's only when you realise each level hides multiple secrets, collectibles and new dances, that *Half-Genie Hero* becomes something greater. These dances (there are plenty of them) allow our heroine to transform into something that has abilities she doesn't possess, allowing her to get higher, lower, underwater... you get the picture. That water you swam across? Now you can transform into a crab and go underneath to find secret treasures. What about that platform that looks impossible to get to? You can transform into a spider and throw your web to it. Yes it's ridiculous, but it's also great fun and rewards exploration and creativity.

Going even further than that simple idea, each level begs to be explored over and over. Even after collecting dances, you can grab hidden items that enhance them. One item allows the mermaid to attack, which gives you another reason to revisit the very first level to get that final collectible that eludes you.

If there's a black mark, it's that the difficulty is very uneven. Some levels seem impossible to get through without taking damage, while the latter bosses fall off a cliff in terms of difficulty. If you've spent any amount of time upgrading your health with items, you'll breeze through the final sections without even trying.

But the platforming is tight, the voice acting (though sparse) is humorous and the music is phenomenal. It's not the longest game, and most people will blast through it in five or six hours simply because it's so addictive finding every single hidden nook and cranny.



△○✕□ **The overworld is where you can choose which level you want to play, but it also shows you how many collectibles and secrets remain. You'll have to remember which skills you need, because it doesn't tell you what's missing on the map.**

Shantae is one of those gems you wouldn't have considered because it looks like it's for kids, but this is a rip-roaring platformer with personality to spare. We didn't expect to love this as much as we do, but it's genuinely one of the most pleasant surprises in a long time.

VERDICT

A delightful surprise that'll warm your heart

8/10



PLAYSTATION CLASSICS #33

METAL GEAR SOLID

FORMAT PLAYSTATION | **RELEASE DATE** 1998 (JAPAN, US), 1999 (UK) | **PUBLISHER** KONAMI | **DEVELOPER** KCEJ
PLAY SCORE N/A | **METACRITIC SCORE** N/A

Kojima created the modern stealth genre with this influential cyber thriller, as well as introducing the iconic Solid Snake to audiences worldwide...

Kojima's 3D translation of his MSX *Metal Gear* series was a landmark game due to its details and depth. You can see this in the way it was initially promoted during E3 1997: displays of Snake blowing up guards with about 20 consecutive C4 bombs, figuring out snowy land masses through the scope and machine-gunning an invisible cyborg ninja while office debris flies through the air. It's this extra dimension to design that makes *MGS* such a significant part of the history of our medium – this was the birth of the modern stealth genre in all its details, all its possibilities in approaching situations however you liked.

For many players, *Metal Gear Solid* was a shock to the system in that Snake's shooting and basic action abilities were just alternative paths in the game – instead, sneaking around was the point. Stealth is something players had to mentally adjust to. That first scenario, when Snake is waiting for the elevator after crawling out of the water, is a brilliantly disguised tutorial. Approach it with open fists and you realise that enemies don't die after they're knocked over. You have no guns, and once the alarm goes off, that's pretty much it for you.

You learn to be quiet. You learn how to choke enemies without accidentally throwing them with the Square button, you learn not to tread through the water on your way past guards and, crucially, you learn to wait. And, once you've grasped these fundamentals, you get good at everything else in *Metal Gear Solid*, too, including the combat. Understanding how to use everything in Snake's inventory, like the scope, claymore mines and rations, enables you to look at every environment laterally, like a puzzle with many solutions, and be rewarded by the intricacy of the way you tackle the situation.

It's still arguably Kojima's most engaging piece of work, on a par with *MGS3* and far outstripping *Sons Of Liberty* as well as, to a lesser extent, *Guns Of The Patriots*. Each *Metal Gear Solid* game is an escalating journey from A to B, fraught with the madness of a gauntlet of boss fights along the way, increasingly bizarre environments and the promise of an unpredictable climax. *Metal Gear*'s boss fights are among the best in the field, frankly. In *MGS*, Kojima took the time to underline the menace of each one, and the results speak for themselves.

THE STORY OF MGS: IN BRIEF

We endeavour to sum up Kojima's self-destructing narrative in one boxout



METAL GEAR SOLID

Big Boss clone Solid Snake is dispatched onto Shadow Moses to stop Liquid, who's holding America hostage with nuclear arms. Snake tries to rescue people from Liquid's FOXHOUND unit but they die. Snake eliminates FOXHOUND one-by-one, saves Meryl and Otacon, destroys the robot Metal Gear then beats Liquid.



METAL GEAR SOLID 2

Snake finds out that the US military has built a Metal Gear, which Ocelot steals. Time jumps forward, and Raiden is looking to stop Solidus Snake, who it's later revealed raised him. It turns out the game has been an attempt by the Patriots to recreate the circumstances of Shadow Moses with Raiden in place of Snake.



METAL GEAR SOLID 3

It's the Sixties, and Big Boss (Naked Snake) is dispatched to rescue a scientist. His mentor, The Boss, betrays him and defects to the Soviet Union. Snake is sent to terminate her, before the truth about the manipulation of The Boss and betrayal by love interest EVA lead to one of the greatest videogame endings of all time.



METAL GEAR SOLID 4

Snake is old. The world is the subject of a war economy manipulated by Liquid Ocelot and presided over by the Patriots, who are an AI created by MGS3's Zero. Raiden is a robot ninja. Big Boss turns up. Meryl marries Johnny Sasaki. Raiden's child is the Milkybar Kid. The ending is too long. Snake wins and has an iPod.

They all have their own angle on insanity; Revolver Ocelot opts for a gun duel in a close-quarters C4 trap, Psycho Mantis infiltrates the mind of love interest Meryl and puts a gun against her head to manipulate Snake, Gray Fox brutally murders soldiers at random, Vulcan Raven cruises around in a tank and Sniper Wolf spends entire days picking out her targets. Then there's the main villain: Liquid Snake. A clone of Big Boss like Solid Snake himself and therefore his genetic equal, despite having an inexplicable bizarre British-American accent and a blonde mullet. They're innovative in appearance, thanks to Yoji Shinkawa's character designs, as well as grotesquely charismatic in their portrayal.

They're the main event in *Metal Gear Solid*, each framed with this mythical feeling of threat, like each comes preloaded with their own torrid histories that have shaped them into these chaotic figures. They all feel like they belong in Shadow Moses, this foreign-feeling icy kingdom of madness. It's become tiresomely popular to slate Hideo Kojima's use of cutscenes, but the way bosses are presented in *MGS* is convincingly cinematic, right down to their names appearing on-screen with the actor's name in brackets. While it might wrest control away from the player, it does so with purpose, with conviction, with good reason, creating almost movie-like scenes.

> "IT'S STILL KOJIMA'S MOST ENGAGING PIECE OF WORK, ON A PAR WITH METAL GEAR SOLID 3"

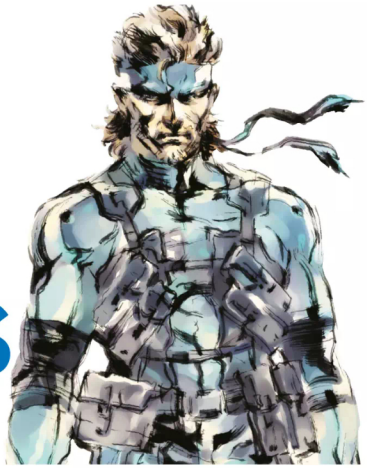
KEY FACTS

- *Metal Gear Solid* topped the United Kingdom charts for eight weeks when it was originally released in 1999, which was a record at the time.
- One of the only games in the series to get a PC port – and actually quite a good one – *MGS* found its way to Windows in late 2000 and works on Windows 7, though it's not available on Steam or GOG.
- *Metal Gear Solid* was remade as *The Twin Snakes* in 2003 by Silicon Knights, but the developer fluffed it a bit by changing the music and rerecording the voice acting. But it did look nice.

And that's the other component of *Metal Gear Solid*'s DNA, the one that is often knocked and rarely applauded when it's good: the influence of cinema. Yes, it's full of cutscenes, but the vast majority are good cutscenes, elevated by a fairly well-translated script and a superb voice cast who were far and above the industry standard at the climax of the CD-ROM age. The story was full of silly bits but there was conviction in the way it was presented, with David Hayter's dramatic gruff interpretation of Snake making him one of the first videogame characters to instantly be known on voice alone.

Just like the stealth mechanics, this cinematic presentation felt new to people. That Kojima handled it so well was expected after such a broad sweep of hype prior to the game's release, and the narrative became intrinsic to the reveal of whatever challenges the player would face next, including the aforementioned bosses. It was by no means the first title to achieve this (Westwood's *Blade Runner* was perhaps even more revolutionary with mo-cap in 1997), but for many of the six million gamers who hadn't seen videogames convincingly brush with motion pictures, this would be a watershed moment.

That's just one part of why *Metal Gear Solid* holds up today, in fact, much better than its flawed successor, bogged down as it is by adolescent conspiracy nonsense and a truncated narrative. The rebirth of the stealth genre prompted by *MGS*, a feat shared with *Thief: The Dark Project*, led to the rise (and eventual fall) of *Splinter Cell* and *Metal Gear*'s own progression in its third and fourth instalments, as well as the proliferation of this genre's mechanics in every game from *GTA* to *Tomb Raider*. Hideo Kojima, meanwhile, became one of the industry's leading lights and the kind of public figure where people would pay attention to absolutely everything he had to say. *Metal Gear Solid* is a worthy success story, a game that remains very easy to fall in love with even today.



TEN EXAMPLES OF MAD GENIUS IN METAL GEAR SOLID

Those moments and ideas that defined Kojima's playstation original, for better or worse



"NEITHER ENEMY NOR FRIEND"

"I've come from another world to do battle with you." The depiction of Gray Fox, Snake's former ally turned resuscitated villain (then ally again) Frank Jaeger is one of the more interesting parts of the game's story due to the character's moral ambiguity, connections to Snake, horrific murder of soldiers in a corridor and redemptive finale. Yoji Shinkawa's skeletal design of this cyborg ninja is one of the most iconic created for a videogame.



MERYL – LOVE INTEREST OR NOT?

Meryl was the token love interest who played the most bizarre role in the story – just why was she in Shadow Moses to begin with? Based on a character of the same name and appearance from Kojima's earlier title *Snatcher*, which came out more than a decade before *MGS*, Meryl flirts a bit with Snake, but her eventual fate in *Metal Gear Solid 4* sort of implies it was only ever a deepened friendship.



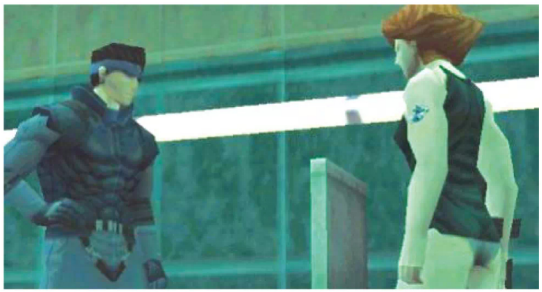
OTACON AND SNAKE'S FRIENDSHIP

Snake's odd relationship with Otacon is one of the unusual highlights of *Metal Gear Solid*: super soldier meets otaku, and what is at first a useful alliance soon turns into a lifelong friendship. Snake's interactions with his allies are all pretty entertaining in *Metal Gear Solid*, yet Otacon brings out a lighter side of Snake that really helps differentiate him from forgettable one-note videogame action heroes.



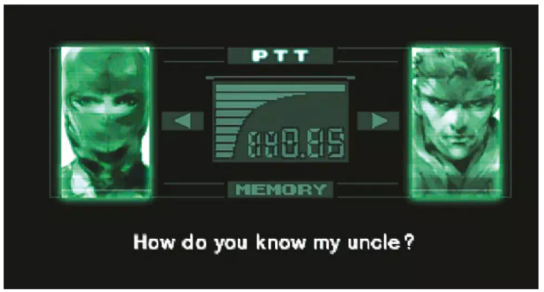
MULTIPLE ENDINGS, VIA TORTURE

A forward-looking idea, failing to resist Revolver Ocelot's torture at around the game's mid-point results in the actually quite nasty consequence of Meryl's death, which changes the ending to Snake escaping Shadow Moses with Otacon instead of Meryl. Multiple endings wouldn't be revisited in subsequent entries despite the success of the idea in *MGS* – so just what was Kojima thinking?



"YOU'VE GOT A GREAT BUTT"

A ludicrous and cheeky bit of vague sexism from Snake that represents the scripting problems of *Metal Gear Solid*, which are about as numerous as its successes. This Eighties action movie bit of trash dialogue is about as bad as it gets, and given that Snake himself was generally pretty respectful to female characters in the sequels, this was a one-off.



BACK OF THE CD CASE

Everyone knows this one and every outlet in history has referenced it to the point of *FFVII*/Aeris' death nightmare fatigue, so it's barely worth talking about. Instead we'll share an anecdote: one writer on this magazine fell foul of the CD case codec idea by playing a pirated version owned by their cousin, using a bad photocopy to work it out. Piracy never wins, kids.



METAL GEAR ITSELF

The beauty of the *Metal Gear* franchise is that, while primarily about the idea of war, espionage and military action, the imagery of the franchise is anything but boring realism. Metal Gear REX is a walking nuclear robot – it's a mech by any other name, pretty much, and as was the case in *Metal Gear* and subsequent games in the series, this is a tenet of the franchise.



THE FINAL BATTLE IS A FISTFIGHT

Despite Solid Snake being armed to the teeth with all the Stinger and Nikita missiles he'll ever need, the last encounter with Liquid Snake, on top of Metal Gear REX, is an elaborate pub brawl – a winning creative choice. The designers know it's more intimate, a raw way to determine the outcome of the story, for players to really feel like Snake earns his superiority in the most cathartic way possible.



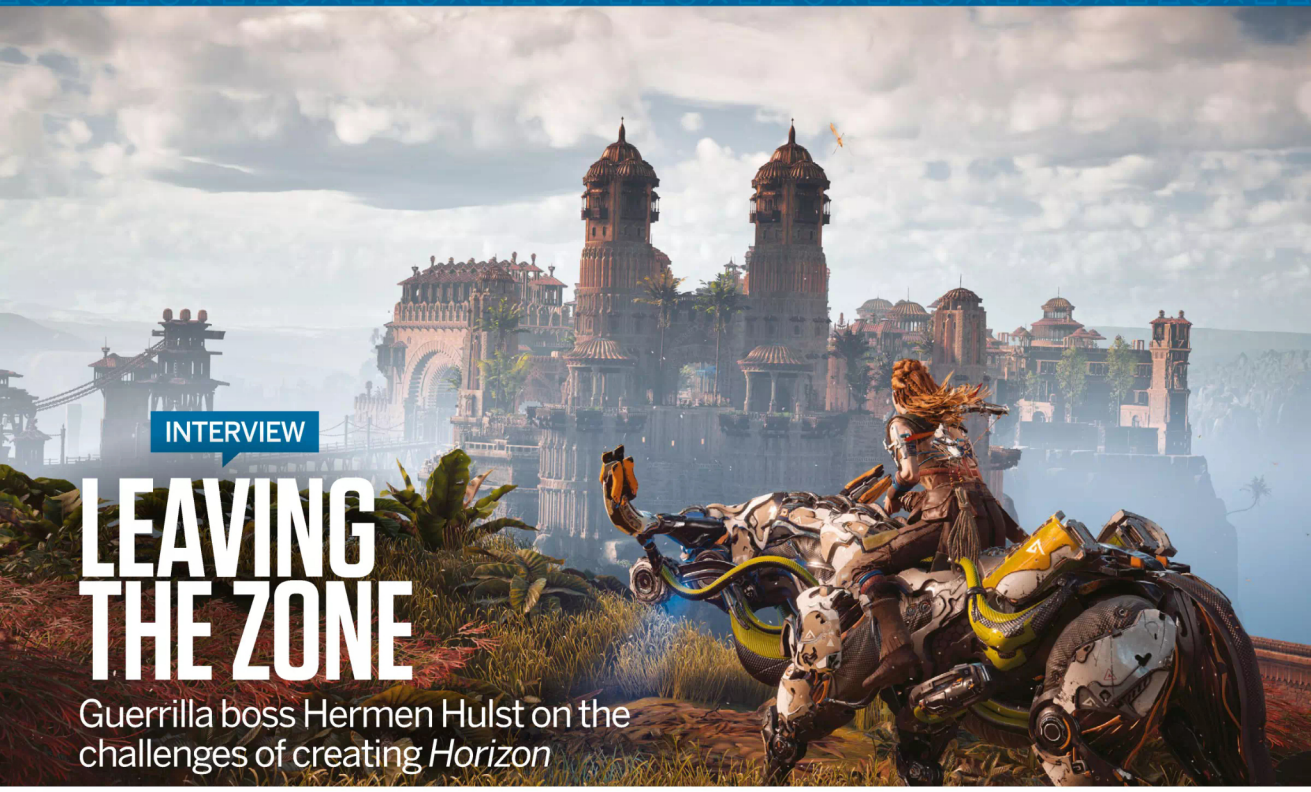
PSYCHO MANTIS

Again, like the CD case idea, the fourth wall nature of this has been discussed to death, so let's focus on the portrayal of Mantis himself. The black skeletal vest, the scorched-looking skin, the gas mask and the strained delivery of his dialogue – this is as close to a horror villain that *MGS* has, a puppet master who manipulates Meryl's actions and makes the player feel more helpless than they would against a bipedal nuclear robot.



SNIPER WOLF

Cataclysmic melodrama as Otacon mourns the death of a boss who tore a bullet through Meryl's stomach and therefore made you backtrack almost to the start of the game. Otacon's blubbing and the howling of an actual wolf are the worst offenders for cutscene nonsense, though the gigantic field setting of the battle is fantastic, and returning to it in *Guns Of The Patriots* to fight Crying Wolf was a real treat.



INTERVIEW

LEAVING THE ZONE

Guerrilla boss Hermen Hulst on the challenges of creating *Horizon*

Was there a general appetite in the studio to move away from FPS and try something new?
I essentially asked the entire development team for ideas; there were many, maybe 40, but we picked out two of the concepts that were interesting. One was incredibly sensible – it hit all of the right boxes and it made sense on so many levels – and that was definitely the wise decision to follow, but the other one was *Horizon: Zero Dawn*. I guess it boils down to the general excitement and the challenge of *Horizon*, more than any desire to leave FPS as a genre; it was more that the entire concept was so exciting to us that we couldn't help but do this project.

Studios rarely take risks as big as this – was there any trepidation as you approached the project?
I think we embraced this project fearlessly, to be honest. But that, obviously, doesn't mean that we didn't do a proper analysis of everything that we needed to know that we already didn't know. Clearly we had work to do with organisational development, we had certain skill sets that we needed to obtain, it had to do with technology – for instance, having an engine that could facilitate the seamless streaming of an open world. On the tool side of things, now for the first time we were building quests and content creation tools for an open world; there was a wide range of improvements, of new people we needed to bring on, of new developments that we needed to do… it has been a massive undertaking. This has been by far the most ambitious project Guerrilla has ever taken on.

Do you feel that your experience in FPS combat and cinematic set piece design informed your way of presenting combat and Aloy in the game?
I would say that we are definitely standing on the shoulders of our learnings and expertise we've gained on the *Killzone* series with our work now on *Horizon: Zero Dawn*. We're again building a science-fiction universe, which is what we've done… but probably more importantly so, intense tactical combat is what we've always strived for in the *Killzone* series and that is exactly what we were trying to create in *Horizon*. At its very essence, you play as a machine huntress, and you play against enemies that have incredible AI – they aren't scripted, they are very fluid and can be very unpredictable – so that the tactical approach that you need to apply is an area that greatly benefits from our expertise from the *Killzone* series. I think it's an opportunity for us to set our game apart from other open world games, our background in intense tactical combat; it isn't easy to do that in an open world or to build up that expertise and I believe that can be something that is special about *Horizon: Zero Dawn*.

What was the process of applying your humanoid AI expertise to animal behaviour like?
Just like the Helghast were the stars of the *Killzone* series, the machines (alongside Aloy) are the stars of *Horizon*. There are a wide variety of them, we really

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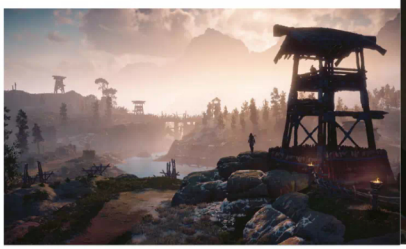
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Dorset
BH2 6EZ





△○×□ ***Horizon*** **is a beautiful game on any PS4, but played on a Pro in 4K with HDR enabled, it's absolutely breathtaking. No open world game has any right to look as good as this. It's just silly.**





designed them with the philosophy of tactical combat in mind; we built up this entire ecosystem of these machines and they have very different purposes. It is important they the player has perception and understands that these machines work together; some scout for danger for others while the others are grazing, others operate in a convoy and they carry objects, and they have different roles and they work together. It is very important that this behaviour isn't scripted, in the sense that they feel free flowing. Certain machine kinds operate in groups and then the group AI behaviour becomes very important as well, but then when you isolate one, its autonomous behaviour has to stand up in its own right.

What led you to Aloy having a rich and developed personality, rather than having her be a silent, player cipher type?

That's an interesting question. Aloy sort of showed up in the original concept; we were concepting this game, lots of gorgeous images of the setting, and it's almost as if she just stepped out of the early concept art – as if she wouldn't be denied, if that doesn't sound too pompous. I kind of phrase it as Aloy was the ideal vessel for the player to inhabit this world, we wanted somebody who is bright, tough and scrappy and she seems to be the perfect vessel for the player to take in the beauty and all of the mysteries of this world.

Just how interwoven are the narrative and the quest design?

There's a huge main quest line that tells the main story but apart from that there are a lot of secondary stories, lots of side-quests and open world activities. You can spend a long time in *Horizon* doing other stuff than the main storyline. There is a lot of free-roaming gameplay that Aloy can engage in, that will still have a lot of back-story relations – where you can learn about the tribes or some of the idiosyncrasies of the world we have created.

Does *Horizon* ever veer into fantasy territory?

No! Fantasy is actually something that we are avoiding. That's actually another thread between *Horizon* and *Killzone*, everything is grounded in reality, that is our design philosophy; we try to design assets in the game that look like they could be made with [modern] technology. It's a science-fiction story that we are telling, full of science-fiction designs and that is really important to us, that it isn't fantasy.

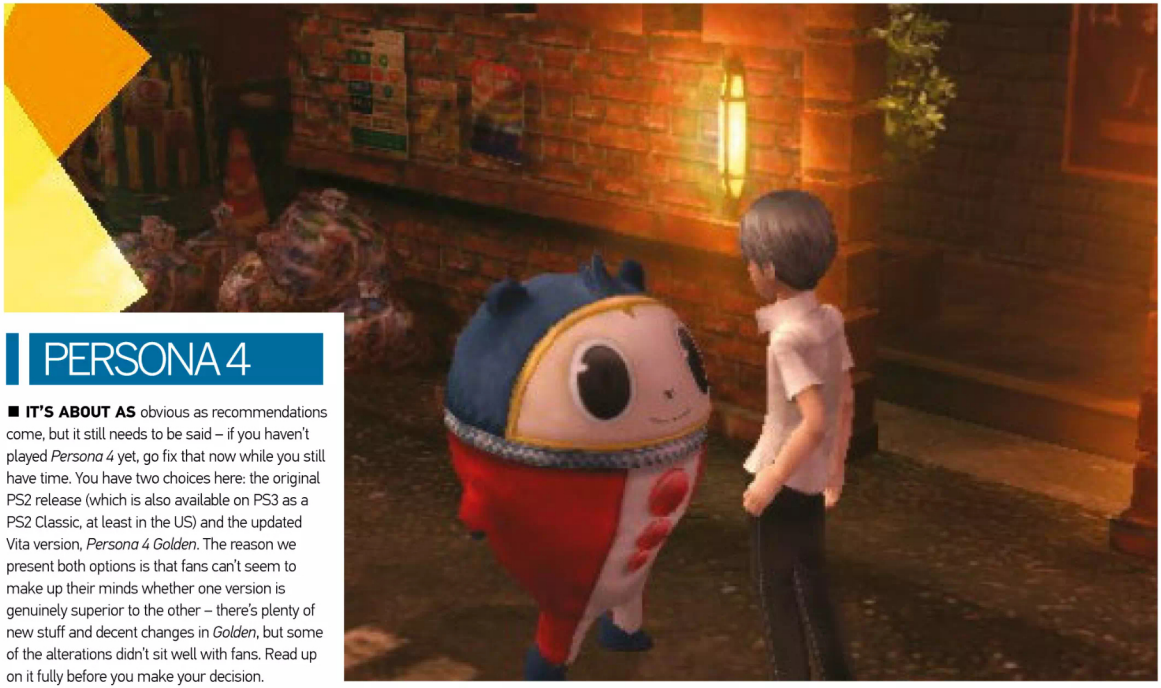
Did you ever wonder if you had bitten off more than you could chew?

The thing about this setting and the universe of the *Horizon* is that it inspires a lot of new and different ideas while you are developing. It is really easy to come up with more ideas, with more gameplay, with more content and with more tribes; it is very easy to diverge, but after going very broad we had to be disciplined . That discipline has been important because it is so easy for everybody to come up with new ideas.

EXTENDED PLAY

PERSONA

Can't wait to get your hands on the style overload that is *Persona 5*? Too bad – if we have to wait, then so do you. In the meantime, here are a few things that might take your fancy...



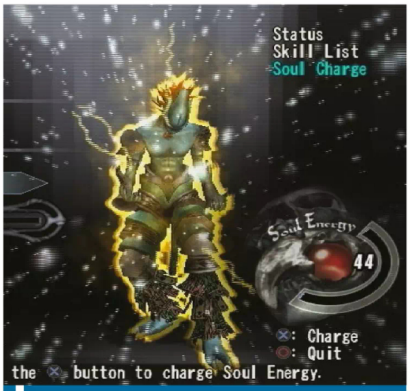
PERSONA 4

■ **IT'S ABOUT AS** obvious as recommendations come, but it still needs to be said – if you haven't played *Persona 4* yet, go fix that now while you still have time. You have two choices here: the original PS2 release (which is also available on PS3 as a PS2 Classic, at least in the US) and the updated Vita version, *Persona 4 Golden*. The reason we present both options is that fans can't seem to make up their minds whether one version is genuinely superior to the other – there's plenty of new stuff and decent changes in *Golden*, but some of the alterations didn't sit well with fans. Read up on it fully before you make your decision.



SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI

■ **THE SERIES THAT** spawned *Persona* as a spin-off sub-series before *Persona* developed its own... well, persona. It's generally quite a bit darker in overall tone and while the playful side of the *Persona* games tends to take some of the edge of the heavier stuff, there's little such relief in the core *Shin Megami Tensei* games. They come in all different forms and more recently, the series seems to have migrated to the 3DS – there have been some great *MegaTen* releases for Nintendo's handheld. Still, if you don't mind slumming it with a PS2 game instead, *Lucifer's Call* is on the PlayStation Store, and it's great.



SHADOW HEARTS

■ **IT'S NOT OFTEN** that we raid the archives and have a PS2 majority on these pages, but that's what happens when the last mainline release in a series came out two generations ago. While *Persona* was coming into its own with *Persona 3 FES* and *Persona 4* on PS2, other RPGs were also offering things that were a bit grittier than the classical *Final Fantasy* and the colourful *Dragon Quest*. This relatively unknown series shares *MegaTen*'s love for all things demonic, but does so with a little of *Persona*'s quirky charm. The battle system is great too, so check it out if you get a chance.



DANCING ALL NIGHT

■ **EVEN AFTER PLAYING** it a bunch, we're still not sure how we feel about *Persona 4: Dancing All Night*, nor how or why it exists. The good news is that it serves as a strong showcase for the excellent music from the game, with the expected slew of button prompts filling the screen in time with the tunes. Trouble is, the patterns are charted to follow vocals and melodies more often than not, and playing along with those (like in the *Project Diva* games) feels a bit weird when you're supposed to be controlling a dancer, who'd naturally follow the beat instead. Still, if you can get out of the rhythm-action mindset and just approach it as a fun piece of fan service, it's perfectly enjoyable. Also, you can dress Teddie up in an Elvis costume, which is almost worth the price of admission on its own.



PERSONA 4 ARENA ULTIMAX

■ **A LOT LIKE** *Dancing All Night*, this 2D fighter has absolutely no right to work, but the results here are significantly more successful. That's what happens when you bring in Arc System Works, the beat-'em-up powerhouse behind the *BlazBlue* and *Guilty Gear* franchises. As with those games, *Arena* (and its upgraded 'super' version, *Ultimax*) looks amazing but knowing that it'd be RPG fans playing it as much as fighting fanatics, ArcSys lowered the barrier to entry considerably. Inputs are simple, systems are easy to use and the game is a blast to play, whether you're a fighting master or not. One of the best spin-offs ever.

TROPHY GUIDE

PS PLUS TROPHY GUIDE

LITTLEBIGPLANET 3

PLATFORM: PS4 **DIFFICULTY:** 2/5
TROPHIES: 32 1 6 8 17

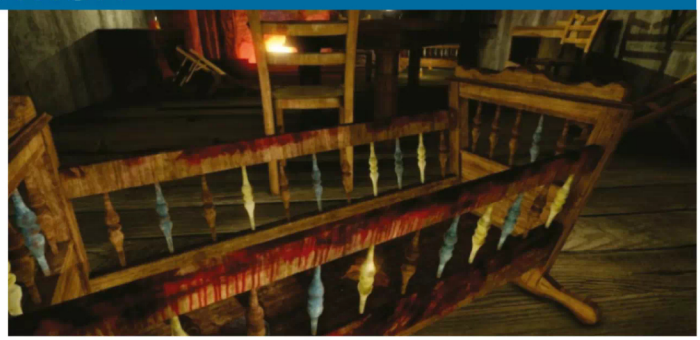
■ **YOU MIGHT THINK** a game with as much potential as this would have a tricky ol' list of Trophies attached, but you'd be wrong. Truth be told, Media Molecule already tried that with the previous games, but resourceful players just ended up making levels that would instantly unlock the vast majority of Trophies, the scoundrels. As a result, a lot of the Trophies here are tied to the game's entertaining Adventure mode, with a handful for messing around in your own creations. Acing each stage isn't a huge ask – it's not the hardest game in the world – but you'll also need to do all of them with at least one other player, so expect to see quite a lot of each level. If you need a break, the creation mode ones can all be obtained in a few minutes.



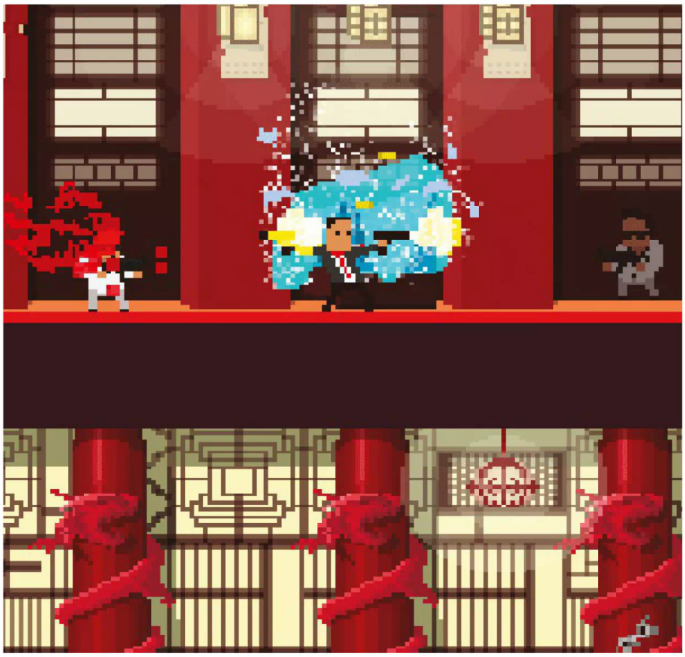
ANNA: EXTENDED EDITION

PLATFORM: PS3 **DIFFICULTY:** 2/5
TROPHIES: 15 0 1 1 13

■ **THIS PS3 HORROR** title is actually pretty good, although not so much for Trophy hunters – like many similar games, a lot of the Trophies here are tied to things that are easily missable if you don't know what you're looking for. And when we say a lot, we mean all bar one. Thankfully, it's a pretty short game (you can get the lone Gold, which involves seeing all eight endings and doing everything else along the way, within ten hours if you know what you're doing), so even those not willing to look up a video guide to find collectables should still be able to make a reasonable dent in the list. 'Ghostbuster!' is the most annoying of the lot, as the 16 spooky events all happen at random, so you may find yourself waiting around a fair bit to see/hear them all.



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NOT A HERO

PLATFORM: PS4 **DIFFICULTY:** 4/5
TROPHIES: 12 0 1 4 7

■ **IT'S A SHAME** this bonkers indie game doesn't have a Platinum, but then just getting this handful of Trophies is tricky enough, so maybe it's for the best. The main problem here is that you'll need to complete all three of each level's challenges in one run, across every level in the game. That seems simple enough as you're starting out, but they quickly grow far more difficult.

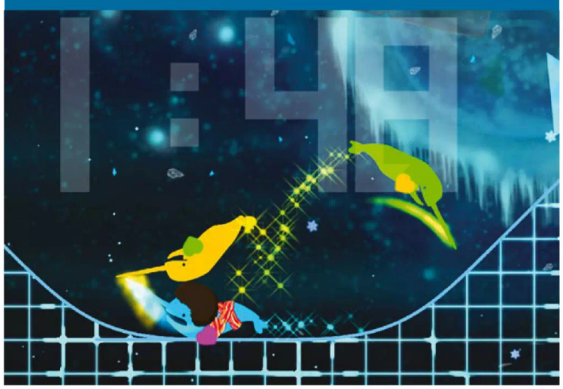
"SEEMS SIMPLE ENOUGH AS YOU'RE STARTING OUT, BUT QUICKLY GROWS FAR MORE DIFFICULT"

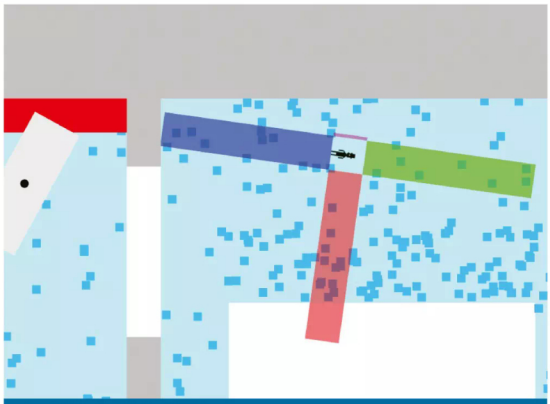
For levels that have timed objectives, you'll want to use Mike once you have unlocked him. He's a solid choice in general, actually, so maybe think about unlocking him before you worry about doing all challenges at once – you'll have a hard job nailing the trickier timed ones without his extra pace anyway.

STARWHAL

PLATFORM: PS4/PS3 **DIFFICULTY:** 3/5
TROPHIES: 23 1 7 7 8

■ **TOWERFALL MIGHT BE** the house favourite when it comes to arena games that make us forget to go to bed, but the nautical nonsense of *Starwhal* is certainly up there with the multiplayer greats. Just as well really, since the Trophy list demands that you play *thousands* of matches across an assortment of modes. Most of the multiplayer ones are just grindy, and can even be boosted with a second controller if you just want them out of the way. It's the challenge ones that will probably give you most grief, however, since the intentionally unwieldy controls don't exactly lend themselves to the kind of precision needed. Perseverance is key here, developing routes and plans for each stage and sticking to them.





TORQUEL

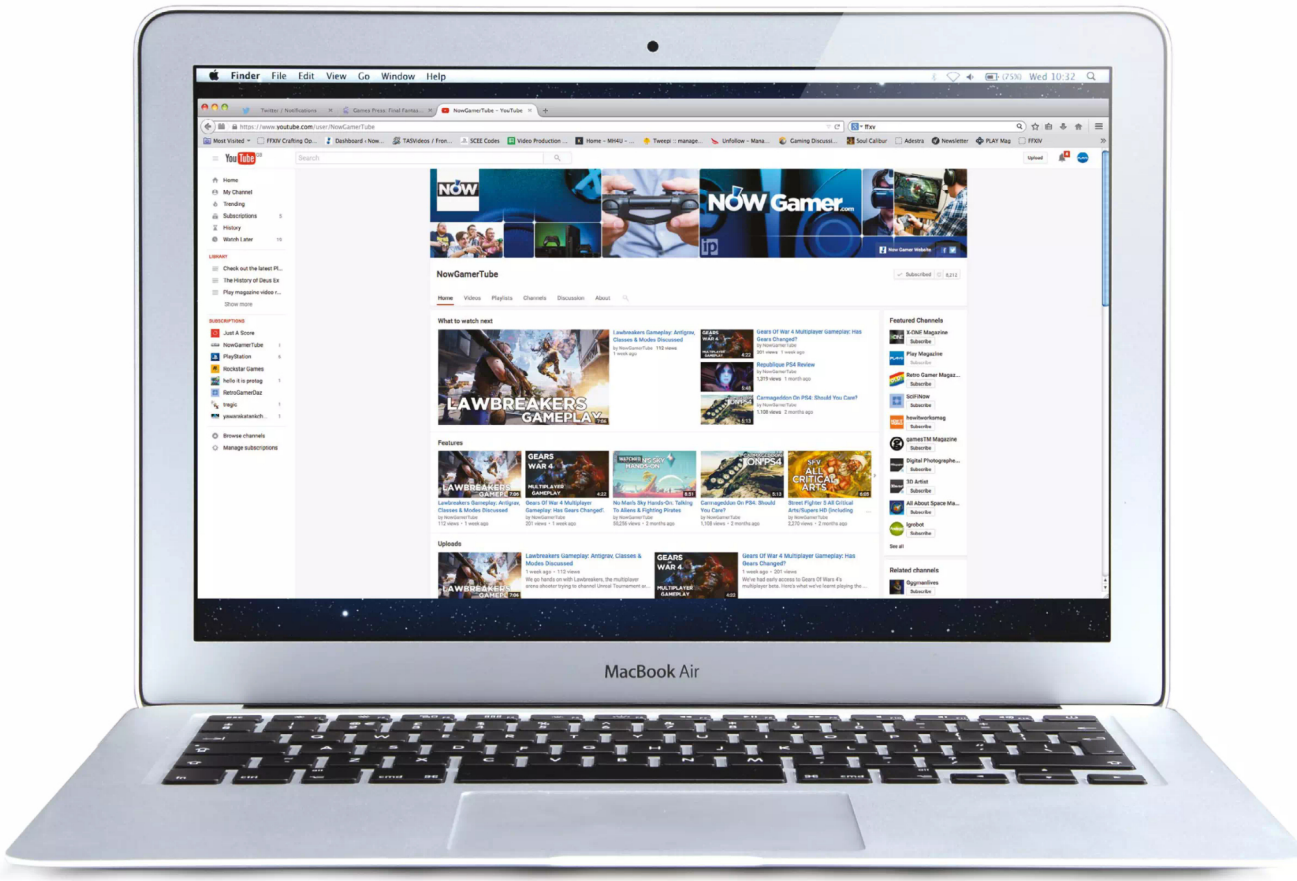
PLATFORM: PS4/VITA **DIFFICULTY:** 3/5
TROPHIES: 13 0 1 3 9

■ **MANIPULATING THE PHYSICS** of this odd little platformer isn't easy at the best of times, but it's made even more frustrating by some extremely demanding Trophies. At one extreme, there are a pair of Silvers available for completing the game without dying and in ten minutes respectively. While these sound extremely taxing, there's a handy little exploit that makes them more doable – quitting a level to the main menu lets you restart that stage from scratch, meaning your death count and time aren't stored. Use this to your advantage to gloss over mistakes, then get ready to leave your console on for ten hours for a Trophy at the other ludicrous extreme.

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DEATH STRANDING



WE STILL CAN'T stop watching the trailers for Kojima's next offering, desperate to figure out something new. So far, we've failed miserably.

NIOH



THE SAMURAI ACTION is intense in this new Team Ninja game, which is part *Ninja Gaiden* and part *Dark Souls*. Check it out!

UNCHARTED: LOST LEGACY



NAUGHTY DOG CAN pretty much do no wrong, so we can't wait to get our hands on this exciting *Uncharted* spin-off. Who needs Drake anyway?

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SHARING



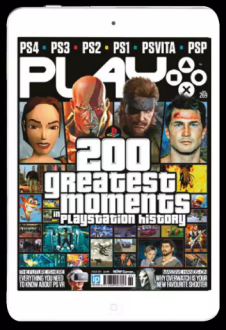
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HOW TO JOIN

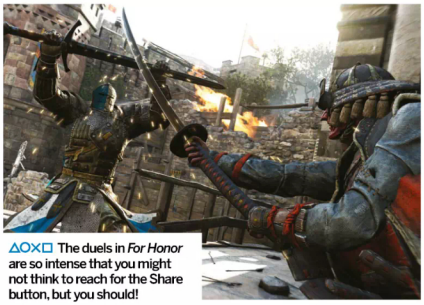
1 Search for Play_Mag_UK in the Friends menu, select our profile, then navigate down to 'Communities'.

2 Press X to open the **Play** Community, then press X again to join it. Welcome to the family!

SEND US YOUR BEST SCREENS



△○×□ *Horizon* is a stupidly good-looking game, and Photo Mode really allows you to make the most of that. Learn to use it and you'll be able to take crazy shots.



△○×□ The duels in *For Honor* are so intense that you might not think to reach for the Share button, but you should!



△○×□ If you're playing on a Pro, don't forget to change the screenshot options in Share Settings to take 4K grabs...

YOU HAVEN'T PLAYED... ?

YAKUZA

People are always complaining that *Shenmue* dropped off the radar for so long. Little do they realise that its spiritual successor has been right under their noses since the PS2 era...







■ **JUXTAPOSITION CAN BE** a powerful tool when used well, and few games employ it better than the *Yakuza* series. The very title implies a visit to the dark criminal underworld of Japan, and that's what you get in all its grim glory – shakedowns, syndicates, rival gangs and brutal, bloody violence are all indeed staples of the series. But as much as it might like to shock with incredible scenes of tension and drama or moments of wince-inducing brutality, you might find yourself mere moments later wasting money of capsule toys, helping out children, recruiting a chicken to your cause, or any number of other daft, playful things... things that would seem to sit completely at odds with the game's subject matter. But somehow, it works.

It's like the freedom offered by games like *GTA* or *Sleeping Dogs*, only taken to the next level. While *Yakuza*'s play areas aren't typically as large as in those games, they're teeming with life and beautifully realised – the neon hum of urban Japan surrounds a dizzying amount of things to see and do, as well as a string of superb stories. If you've ever been tempted to try the series, now's the perfect time. The recently released *Yakuza 0* serves as a prequel to the series, meaning there's no assumed knowledge of characters or settings. You can join Kiryu from the very start of his criminal career, and the game has been significantly streamlined over *Yakuza 5*, so it's nowhere near as overwhelming or cluttered as the last game.

TAKE A BREAK

Even crime bosses need to take a load off sometimes...



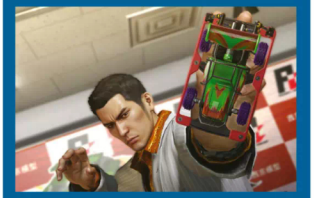
HIT THE ARCADES

Classic Sega games are playable in every game. *Yakuza 6* even has the full version of *Virtua Fighter 5FS*!



GO TO A SHOW

Cabaret shows, hostess clubs, karaoke bars, adult shows... there's loads to see in Japan's seedy underbelly.



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LET'S PLAY... PARTY GAMES



LUKE ALBIGÉS
RIBBIT KING

8 It's the best-worst game ever made, and multiplayer is pure madness. Belt your frog around a course while random elements add to your score. I've never seen a game provoke such laughter...



ANDY SALTER
SKYRIM

10 Andy used to be a party-goer like you, but then he took an arrow to the knee. But that didn't stop him going out to play *Pokémon Go* all the time, so maybe he's just being lazy by staying in playing *Skyrim*.



STEVE HOLMES
FIFA 17

8 Few games make me happier than *FIFA*, but few games can make me as angry, either. There's nothing like gloating at a mate while holding a two-goal lead... only to have them sneak in three in injury time. Bollocks.



DREW SLEEP
ROCK BAND 3

8 Last time we all played *Rock Band*, Drew surprised everyone by climbing on top of a six-foot fridge-freezer to perform a bass solo. True story. Funnily enough, we've not played *Rock Band* since.

PS4



GAME	ISSUE	SCORE
Abzu	273	7
Alekhine's Gun	**270**	3
Alien: Isolation	249	9
Alienation	**270**	8
Amplitude	266	8
Arslan: The Warriors Of Legend	**268**	5
Assassin's Creed Chronicles: China	257	7
Assassin's Creed Chronicles: India	**266**	7
Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag	237	8
Assassin's Creed Syndicate	**264**	4
Assassin's Creed: Unity	251	6
Axiom Verge	**256**	9
Batman: Arkham Knight	258	9
Batman: The Telltale Series – Episode One	**274**	4
Battleborn	271	6
Battlefield 1	276	7
Battlefield 4	**238**	8
Battlefield Hardline	256	7
BioShock: The Collection	275	7
Blazblue Central Fiction	277	8
Blazblue Chronophantasma Extend	**264**	9
Bloodborne	256	9
Bloodborne: The Old Hunters	**265**	9
Bound	274	7
Bound By Flame	245	6
Broforce	**268**	6
Call Of Duty: Advanced Warfare	251	8
Call Of Duty: Black Ops III	**264**	8
Call Of Duty: Ghosts	238	7
Call Of Duty: Infinite Warfare	276	5
Child Of Light	**244**	7
CounterSpy	248	5
DariusBurst: Chronicle Saviours	**266**	8
Dark Souls III	269	9
Day Of The Tentacle Remastered	**269**	8
Daylight	245	2
Dead Nation: Apocalypse Edition	**242**	7
Dead Or Alive 5: Last Round	254	7
Destiny	**249**	9
Destiny: House Of Wolves	258	8
Destiny: Rise Of Iron	275	8
Destiny: The Dark Below	**252**	7
Destiny: The Taken King	262	9
Deus Ex: Mankind Divided	274	6
Devil May Cry 4: Special Edition	**258**	8
Diablo III: Reaper Of Souls	248	9
Dirt Rally	**269**	9
Dishonored 2	277	9
Disney Infinity 2.0	**249**	8
Divinity: Original Sin Enhanced Edition	264	8
Don't Starve	**240**	8
Doom	271	8
Dragon Age: Inquisition	**251**	8
Dragon Ball Xenoverse	255	5
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Far Cry Primal	**268**	8
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FIFA 15	**249**	8
FIFA 16	262	9
FIFA 17	**275**	8
Final Fantasy Type-0	255	8
Final Fantasy XIV: A Realm Reborn	**243**	9
Final Fantasy XV	277	9
Firewatch	**267**	6
Furi	272	8
Game Of Thrones: Iron From Ice	**253**	8
Geometry Wars 3: Dimensions	252	9
God Eater 2: Rage Burst	**275**	6
God Of War III Remastered	**260**	8
Grand Theft Auto V	**251**	10
Grim Fandango Remastered	**254**	8
Guilty Gear Xrd -Revelator-	272	9
Guilty Gear Xrd -SIGN-*	**253**	9
Guitar Hero Live	264	8
Hardware: Rivals	266	5
Headlander	**273**	6
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Hohokum	248	8
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inFamous: First Light	**249**	5
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The newest games, freshly squeezed among all your old favourites

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Watch Dogs 2	7
Steep	6
The Last Guardian	6
The Walking Dead Season 3 E1&2	5

PS3

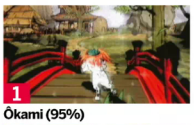


GAME	ISSUE	SCORE
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Alien Breed 3: Descent	204	6
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Battlefield: Bad Company 2	190	9
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The Club	163	8
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Colin McRae: DiRT 2	184	8
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Command & Conquer	**175**	**4**
Conan	160	7
Condemned 2	**165**	**7**
Costume Quest	199	7
Counter Strike: Global Offensive	**223**	**9**
Crash Time 4: The Syndicate	218	3
Crysis 2	**204**	**7**
Crysis 3	230	6
Cubixx HD	**207**	**7**
The Cursed Crusade	211	4
Damnation	**181**	**3**
Damage Inc: Pacific Squadron WWII	223	3
Dante's Inferno	**189**	**8**
The Darkness	154	9
The Darkness II	**215**	**7**
Dark Sector	165	6
Dark Souls	**211**	**9**
Dark Souls II	242	9
Darkstalkers Resurrection	**230**	**8**
Dark Void	188	8
Darksiders	**188**	**8**
Darksiders II	221	8
DC Universe Online	**202**	**8**
Dead Or Alive 5	223	7
Dead Island	**210**	**7**
Dead Island: Riptide	231	6
Dead Rising 2	**197**	**8**
Dead Rising 2: Off The Record	211	6
Dead Space	**172**	**9**
Dead Space 2	201	9
Dead Space 3	**228**	**7**
Dead Space: Extraction	203	8
Dead Space: Ignition	**199**	**4**
Dead To Rights: Retribution	192	6
Deadly Premonition: The Director's Cut	**231**	**8**
Deadpool	233	6
Demon's Souls	**193**	**9**
Destroy All Humans!: Path Of The Furon	178	2
Derrick The Deathfin	**227**	**7**
Deus Ex: Human Revolution	209	9
Devil May Cry 4	**163**	**9**
Devil May Cry HD Collection	217	8
Diablo III	**235**	**9**
DiRT 3	206	8
DiRT Showdown	**219**	**7**
Disgaea 3: Absence Of Justice	175	8
Dishonored	**224**	**9**
Disney Infinity	235	8
DJ Hero	**186**	**9**
DJ Hero 2	198	8
Doctor Who: The Eternity Clock	**220**	**3**
Doom 3: BFG Edition	225	6
DmC Devil May Cry	227	9
Dragon Age: Origins	**186**	**8**
Dragon Age II	203	6
Dragon Ball: Raging Blast	**186**	**4**
Dragon Ball Z: Burst Limit	168	6
Dragon's Crown	**235**	**8**
Dragon's Dogma	218	8
Driver: San Francisco	**209**	**7**
Duke Nukem Forever	207	3
Dungeon Siege III	**206**	**8**
Dynasty Warriors: Gundam 3	208	5
Dynasty Warriors 6: Empires	**181**	**4**
Dynasty Warriors 7: Empires	230	4
Dynasty Warriors 8	**234**	**7**
EA Sports Active 2	200	8
EA Sports MMA	**198**	**8**
Eat Lead	178	3
echochrome	**169**	**8**
echochrome II	202	8
EDF: Insect Armageddon	**208**	**6**
The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion	152	9
The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim	**212**	**9**
Elefunk	170	4
El Shaddai: Ascension Of The Metatron	**208**	**7**
Enchanted Arms	152	6
Enslaved: Odyssey To The West	**197**	**8**
Epic Mickey 2: The Power Of Two	226	5
Eternal Sonata	**176**	**8**
Everybody's Golf: World Tour	165	9
Eye Of Judgment	159	6
EyePet	**185**	**8**
F1 2012	223	7
F1 Race Stars	**226**	**6**
FaceBreaker	170	5
Fairy Fencer F	**250**	**4**
Fallout 3	**173**	**10**
Fallout: New Vegas	**198**	**8**
Fantastic Four: Rise Of The Silver Surfer	155	3
Far Cry 2	**172**	**7**
Far Cry 3	226	8
Far Cry 3: Blood Dragon	**231**	**8**
Fat Princess	183	6
FEAR	**151**	**8**
FEAR 2: Project Origin	176	8
FEAR 3	**208**	**6**
FIFA 13	223	8
FIFA 14	**236**	**9**
The Fight	199	4
Fight Night Champion	**203**	**8**
Fight Night Round 3	151	8
Fight Night Round 4	**181**	**8**
Final Fantasy XIV: A Realm Reborn	236	8
Final Fantasy XIII	**190**	**8**
Final Fantasy XIII-2	214	8
Final Fantasy XIII: Lightning Returns	**240**	**8**
Fist Of The North Star: Ken's Rage	198	5
Fist Of The North Star: Ken's Rage 2	**230**	**5**
Flight Control HD	198	8
Flock!	**179**	**7**
Folklore	158	6
Front Mission Evolved	**198**	**5**
Fuel	180	4
Full Auto 2: Battlelines	**151**	**6**
Fuse	232	7
Genji: Days Of The Blade	**151**	**3**
Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2	157	8
Ghost Recon Future Soldier	**219**	**6**
GI Joe	**183**	**2**
The Godfather	151	3

*denotes import review

TEN YEARS AGO

BEST REVIEWS (150)



1 **Ôkami (95%)**



2 **Metal Slug Anthology (91%)**



3 **Virtua Tennis 3 (90%)**



4 **MGS: Portable Ops (90%)**



5 **Virtua Fighter 5 (83%)**



6 **Bomberman (83%)**



7 **Tekken DR HD (80%)**



8 **Ghost Rider (79%)**

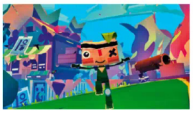


9 **Gran Turismo HD (75%)**



10 **F1 Championship Edition (72%)**

PLAY'S BEST GAMES IF YOU LOVE...



ADORABLE THINGS
PLAY: TEARAWAY
Either *Unfolded* on PS4 or the original on Vita – doesn't matter which. All that matters is that you experience this sickly-sweet adventure for yourself, because it's too charming for its own good.



SUPER SMASH BROS.
PLAY: PLAYSTATION ALL-STARS BATTLE ROYALE
Okay, so Sony's attempt at a manic arena combat game wasn't up to the standards of the Nintendo equivalent. But it's still fun for what it is, especially if you can learn to love the super-KO mechanic.



PS4 PRO ENHANCEMENTS
PLAY: JUST CAUSE 3
Some moments in this explosive escapade would bring a launch PS4 to its knees. But now, thanks to the Pro's Boost mode, it runs almost perfectly smooth, even without a patch!



SERIOUS GAMES THAT CAN BE ACCIDENTALLY HILARIOUS
PLAY: LA NOIRE
Conversations in Rockstar's detective game often take a strange turn – questioning witnesses tends to lead to bellowing at them and calling them liars. Chill out, Phelps...



WORKING OVERTIME
PLAY: THE TOMORROW CHILDREN
We were worried when we first got our hands on *The Tomorrow Children* that the gameplay loop could be too obnoxiously repetitive for it to be much fun. And we were absolutely right.

GAME	ISSUE	SCORE
The Godfather II	178	4
God Of War III	190	9
God Of War: Ascension	230	9
God Of War Collection*	188	9
God Of War Collection: Volume II	210	7
Gotham City Imposters	216	7
Gran Turismo 5	200	8
Gran Turismo 6	239	8
Grand Theft Auto IV	166	9
Grand Theft Auto V	236	10
Greed Corp	191	7
Grid 2	232	7
Grid Autosport	246	6
GTI Club+	174	7
GTA: Episodes From Liberty City	191	9
Guardians Of Middle-earth	227	7
Guitar Hero III	160	9
Guitar Hero 5	184	8
Guitar Hero Greatest Hits	182	7
Guitar Hero Metallica	179	8
Guitar Hero: Van Halen	189	6
Guitar Hero: Warriors Of Rock	197	7
Guitar Hero World Tour	173	9
Gundemonium Collection	197	8
Gunstar Heroes	181	8
Harry Potter And The Half-Blood Prince	182	6
Harry Potter And The Order Of The Phoenix	155	3
Haze	167	6
Heavenly Sword	157	7
Heavy Rain	189	9
Heavy Weapon	187	7
Heroes Over Europe	184	4
Hitman: Absolution	225	9
Hitman HD Trilogy	230	7
Homefront	203	6
The House Of The Dead 4	218	8
The House Of The Dead: Overkill	212	7
Hunted: The Demon's Forge	207	5
Hustle Kings	190	8
Hyperdimension Neptunia	202	2
I Am Alive	217	6
Ico & Shadow Of The Colossus HD	210	9
The Incredible Hulk	168	5
inFamous	180	8
inFamous 2	207	8
Inferno Pool	181	8
Injustice: Gods Among Us	231	8
Inversion	220	4
Iron Man	166	5
Iron Man 2	193	5
The Jak And Daxter Trilogy	216	8
Jak And Daxter: The Lost Frontier	187	5
James Bond 007: Blood Stone	199	6
James Cameron's Avatar: The Game	187	6
JoJo's Bizarre Adventure: All Star Battle	244	8
Journey	216	9
Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights	159	7
Jurassic Park: The Game	194	6
Just Cause 2	190	8
Kane & Lynch: Dead Men	160	7
Kane & Lynch 2: Dog Days	196	7
Katamari Forever	184	8
Kick-Ass The Game	194	6
Killer Is Dead	235	7
Killzone 2	176	9
Killzone 3	202	8
Kingdom Hearts HD 1.5 ReMIX	236	8
Kingdom Hearts 2.5 HD ReMIX	252	9
Kingdoms Of Amalur: Reckoning	215	7
The King Of Fighters XII	182	7
The King Of Fighters XIII	213	8
Kung Fu Panda 2	207	2
Kung Fu Rider	196	6
Lair	158	5
LA Noire	206	9
Lara Croft And The Guardian Of Light	198	9
The Last Guy	171	9
Last Rebellion	191	4
Legend Of Spyro: Dawn Of The Dragon	174	5
Legendary	173	6
Lego Batman	173	6
Lego Batman 2	221	8
Lego Harry Potter: Years 1-4	194	7
Lego Harry Potter: Years 5-7	213	6
Lego Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures	167	7
Lego Indiana Jones 2: The Adventure Continues	187	7
Lego Pirates Of The Caribbean	206	7
Lego Rock Band	187	8
Lego Star Wars: The Complete Saga	160	7
Lego Star Wars III: The Clone Wars	204	8
Lego The Lord Of The Rings	227	7
Leisure Suit Larry: Box Office Bust	180	2
Limbo	209	9
LittleBigPlanet	172	9
LittleBigPlanet 2	201	10
LittleBigPlanet: Karting	225	8
Lollipop Chainsaw	221	7
London 2012	221	4
The Lord Of The Rings: Aragorn's Quest	199	6
The Lord Of The Rings: Conquest	175	5
The Lord Of The Rings: War In The North	213	4
Lost Planet 2	192	8
Lost Planet 3	236	5
Lost Planet: Extreme Condition	163	6
Madagascar 3	224	3
Madden NFL 12	209	8
Madden NFL 13	223	8
Madden NFL Arcade	188	5
Mafia II	196	8
Magic: Duels Of The Planeswalkers	202	8
Marvel Vs Capcom 2	182	9
Marvel Vs Capcom 3	202	8
Marvel Ultimate Alliance	151	6
Marvel Ultimate Alliance 2	185	6
Max Payne 3	219	7
Mass Effect 2	201	10
Mass Effect 3	216	9
Medal Of Honor	198	8
Medal Of Honor Airborne	161	8
Medal Of Honor: Warfighter	225	7
Mega Man 9	172	7
Mega Man 10	192	8
Mercenaries 2: World In Flames	171	7
Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance	228	9



Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance is another world-class entry in gaming's most fundamentally playable genre.

Metal Gear Solid 4	167	9
Metal Gear Solid HD Collection	214	9
Metro: Last Light	231	6
Michael Jackson: The Experience	205	5
Microbot	202	5
Midnight Club: Los Angeles	173	8
Mindjack	202	3
Minecraft	240	9
Mini Ninjas	184	8
Mirror's Edge	173	7
MLB: The Show 14	245	9
ModNation Racers	192	8
Monkey Island 2: Special Edition	195	9
Mortal Kombat	205	8
Mortal Kombat Vs DC Universe	173	6
MotoGP 13	233	7
Motorhead	173	6
MotorStorm	151	9
MotorStorm: Apocalypse	203	7
MotorStorm: Pacific Rift	172	9
Mud: FIM Motocross Championship	217	5
MX Vs ATV Alive	206	4
MX Vs ATV Reflex	189	6
Naruto: Ultimate Ninja Storm	174	6
Naruto Shippuden: UNS Generations	217	5
Naruto Shippuden: UNS 3	230	8
Naughty Bear	195	6
NBA 2K12	211	8
NBA 2K13	224	8
NBA Jam	200	6
NBA Street: Homecourt	151	6
Need For Speed: Hot Pursuit	199	9
Need For Speed: Most Wanted	225	9
Need For Speed ProStreet	161	8
Need For Speed Shift	184	8
Need For Speed: The Run	213	6
Need For Speed Undercover	173	7
NeverDead	215	3
Nier	192	6
Ni No Kuni: Wrath Of The White Witch	227	8
NHL 12	210	7
NHL 13	223	7
NiGHTS Into Dreams...	224	7
Ninja Gaiden Sigma	154	8
Ninja Gaiden Sigma 2	184	8
Ninja Gaiden 3	217	6
Ninja Gaiden 3: Razor's Edge	231	8
Noby Noby Boy	177	8
No More Heroes: Heroes' Paradise	206	8
Nucleus	155	8
Okami HD	225	9
One Piece: Pirate Warriors	224	6
Operation Flashpoint: Dragon Rising	185	7
Operation Flashpoint: Red River	205	7
The Orange Box	161	9
Outland	207	7
OutRun Online Arcade	180	8
Overlord II	181	6
Pac-Man Championship Edition DX	201	9
Pain	183	6
Payday: The Heist	213	8
Payday 2	235	8
Peggle	189	9
Persona 4 Arena Ultimax	250	9
PES 2012	210	7
PixelJunk 4am	220	4
PixelJunk Eden	169	6
PixelJunk Shooter	187	9
PixelJunk Shooter 2	204	9
PixelJunk SideScroller	213	7
PixelJunk Racers	160	7
PlayStation All-Stars Battle Royale	225	8
PlayStation Move Heroes	204	5
Poker Night 2	232	5
Portal 2	205	10
Prince Of Persia	174	8
Prince Of Persia: Classic	173	6
Prince Of Persia: The Forgotten Sands	193	6
Prince Of Persia Trilogy	200	8
Prison Break: The Conspiracy	191	4
Prototype	181	7
Prototype 2	219	7
Puddle	216	7
The Punisher: No Mercy	182	4
Puppeteer	236	7
Pure	171	8
Quantum Of Solace	175	5
Quantum Theory	197	2
Race Driver: GRID	167	8
Rag Doll Kung-Fu: Fists Of Plastic	179	8
Rage	211	6
Rainbow Six Vegas	155	9
Rainbow Six Vegas 2	164	8
Rango	203	5
Ratchet & Clank: A Crack In Time	186	8
Ratchet & Clank: All 4 One	211	6
Ratchet & Clank: Q-Force	227	5
Ratchet & Clank: Tools Of Destruction	160	7
Ratchet & Clank Trilogy HD	221	9
Rayman Legends	235	8
Rayman Origins	212	8
Red Dead Redemption	193	9
Red Faction: Armageddon	207	6
Red Faction: Guerrilla	180	8
Remember Me	232	6
Renegade Ops	211	7
Resident Evil Chronicles HD Collection	221	8
Resident Evil Code Veronica X	211	7
Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City	217	3
Resident Evil: Revelations HD	232	7
Resident Evil 4 HD	210	9
Resident Evil 5	177	8
Resident Evil 6	223	8
Resistance: Fall Of Man	151	8
Resistance 2	173	9
Resistance 3	210	9
Resonance Of Fate	191	8
Retro City Rampage	228	7
Ridge Racer 7	151	7
Ridge Racer Unbounded	217	6
Riff: Everyday Shooter	162	8
Rise Of The Argonauts	176	5
Risen 2: Dark Waters	222	5
Risen 3: Titan Lords	248	2
Risk: Factions	202	8
Rock Band Blitz	223	8
Rock Band	169	9
Rock Band 2	179	9
Rock Band 3	199	9
Rocksmith	223	7
Rogue Warrior	188	1
Rugby World Cup 2011	209	4
Rune Factory Oceans	220	5
RUSE	197	8

GAME	ISSUE	SCORE
The Saboteur	187	6
Sacred 2: Fallen Angel	**180**	**7**
Sacred 3	247	6
Saints Row 2	**172**	**7**
Saints Row: The Third	211	8
Saints Row IV: Gat Out Of Hell	**253**	**6**
SBK Generations	220	5
Sam & Max: The Devil's Playhouse	**194**	**9**
SBK Generations	220	5
The Secret Of Monkey Island SE	**195**	**9**
Section 8: Prejudice	209	8
Sega Mega Drive Ultimate Collection	**177**	**8**
Sega Rally	158	9
Sega Rally Online Arcade	**208**	**7**
Sengoku Basara: Samurai Heroes	198	7
Shadows Of The Damned	**207**	**8**
Shank	197	8
Shatter	**183**	**9**
Shellshock 2: Blood Trails	177	3
Shift 2: Unleashed	**204**	**6**
Silent Hill: Downpour	**217**	**8**
Silent Hill HD Collection	217	7
Silent Hill: Homecoming	**174**	**6**
The Simpsons Game	**160**	**8**
The Sims 3	199	8
The Sims 3: Pets	**212**	**7**
SingStar	159	8
Singularity	**195**	**8**
Siren Blood Curse	170	6
Skate	**159**	**8**
Skate 2	175	8
Skate 3	**192**	**8**
Skullgirls	218	8
Sleeping Dogs	**222**	**8**
The Sly Collection	200	8
Sly Cooper: Thieves In Time	**230**	**6**
Sniper Elite V2	218	5
Sniper: Ghost Warrior	**206**	**4**
Sniper: Ghost Warrior 2	230	5
SOCOM: Special Forces	**205**	**6**
Sonic The Hedgehog 4: Episode 1	199	8
Sonic The Hedgehog 4: Episode 2	**225**	**4**
Sonic & Sega All-Stars Racing	190	7
Sonic & All-Stars Racing Transformed	**227**	**9**
Sonic Generations	212	7
Sonic The Hedgehog	**151**	**5**
Sonic Unleashed	175	4
Sorcery	**219**	**7**
SoulCalibur IV	169	9
SoulCalibur V	**214**	**8**
South Park: The Stick of Truth	242	8
Spec Ops: The Line	**220**	**7**
Spider-Man 3	155	3
Spider-Man: Edge Of Time	**212**	**3**
Spider-Man: Shattered Dimensions	197	6
Spider-Man: Web Of Shadows	**173**	**5**
Spin Jam	174	3
Splatterhouse	**200**	**5**
Splinter Cell Double Agent	153	7
Split/Second: Velocity	**192**	**9**
Sports Champions	196	8
Sports Champions 2	**225**	**6**
SSX	216	4
Stacking	**203**	**8**
Starhawk	219	8
Star Ocean: The Last Hope International	**190**	**6**
Star Trek	231	5
Star Trek: D-A-C	**189**	**5**
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	171	6
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed II	**199**	**6**
Star Wars: Pinball	230	7
Start The Party!	**196**	**7**
Stormrise	178	5
Stranglehold	**159**	**6**
Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike Online Edition	209	9
Street Fighter IV	**176**	**9**
Street Fighter X Tekken	217	8
Strength Of The Sword 3	**234**	**8**
Super Puzzle Fighter II HD Turbo Remix	168	7
Super Street Fighter IV: Arcade Edition	**207**	**9**
Stuntman: Ignition	157	8
Super Stardust HD	**155**	**7**
Superstars V8: Next Challenge	190	5
Superstars V8 Racing	**181**	**6**
Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix	176	7
Super Street Fighter IV	**191**	**9**
Syndicate	**216**	**7**

GAME	ISSUE	SCORE
Tales Of Graces f	222	7
Tales Of Monkey Island	**196**	**9**
Tales Of Xillia	234	7
Tales Of Xillia 2	**249**	**7**
Tekken 5: Dark Resurrection Online	161	8
Tekken 6	**184**	**9**
Tekken Tag Tournament 2	223	9
Test Drive Ferrari Racing Legends	**221**	**6**
Tetris	202	8
Test Drive Unlimited 2	**203**	**6**
The Amazing Spider-Man	221	6
The Last Of Us	**233**	**10**
The Testament Of Sherlock Holmes	**224**	**5**
The Walking Dead	231	9
The Walking Dead: Survival Instinct	**231**	**2**
Thor: God Of Thunder	206	3
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 14	**231**	**6**
Time Crisis 4	166	7
Time Crisis: Razing Storm	**199**	**5**
TimeShift	162	7
Tokyo Jungle	**223**	**8**
Tom Clancy's EndWar	173	8
Tom Clancy's HAWX	**177**	**7**
Tom Clancy's HAWX 2	196	7
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell Blacklist	**235**	**7**
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell Trilogy HD	210	7
Tomb Raider	**229**	**9**
Tomb Raider Trilogy	204	8
Tomb Raider: Underworld	**173**	**8**
Tony Hawk's Project 8	151	8
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater HD	**223**	**7**
Tony Hawk's Proving Ground	160	7
Tony Hawk: Ride	**188**	**5**
Top Gun: Hard Lock	218	4
Top Spin 3	**168**	**7**
Top Spin 4	203	6
Toy Story 3	**195**	**8**
Transformers: Dark Of The Moon	208	6
Transformers: Fall Of Cybertron	**223**	**7**
Transformers: War For Cybertron	194	8
Trash Panic	**181**	**7**
Trine	184	8
Trinity: Souls Of Zill O'll	**202**	**5**
Trinity Universe	194	6
Tron Evolution	**200**	**1**
Tumble	198	7
Turning Point: Fall Of Liberty	**165**	**4**
Turok	163	4
Twisted Metal	**216**	**6**
UFC Undisputed 2009	180	9
UFC Undisputed 2010	**193**	**8**
UFC Undisputed 3	215	8
Ultimate Marvel Vs Capcom 3	**212**	**8**
Ultra Street Fighter IV	246	9
Uncharted: Drake's Fortune	**161**	**8**
Uncharted 2: Among Thieves	**185**	**10**
Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception	212	9
Unearthed: Trail Of Ibn Battuta: Episode 1	233	1
The Unfinished Swan	**225**	**7**
Unreal Tournament III	162	8
Untold Legends: Dark Kingdom	**151**	**5**
Valkyria Chronicles	173	8
Vanquish	**197**	**9**
Viking: Battle For Asgard	**165**	**7**
Virtua Fighter 5: Final Showdown	**220**	**9**
Virtua Tennis 3	150	9
Virtua Tennis 4	**205**	**7**
The Walking Dead: All That Remains	**240**	**8**
The Walking Dead: 400 Days	234	8
Wanted: Weapons Of Fate	**179**	**6**
Warhammer 40,000: Space Marine	210	5
Warhawk	**157**	**8**
Warriors: Legends Of Troy	202	1
Warriors Orochi 3	**217**	**5**
Watchmen: The End Is Nigh	183	5
Way Of The Samurai 3	**190**	**2**
Wet	184	4
Wheelman	**178**	**7**
Where The Wild Things Are	188	5
White Knight Chronicles	**190**	**5**
White Knight Chronicles II	207	4
WipEout HD	**172**	**8**
Wolfenstein	183	7
Worms 2: Armageddon	198	8
Worms Ultimate Mayhem	**217**	**8**
WRC 3 FIA World Rally Championship	225	7
WWE All Stars	**204**	**8**

GAME	ISSUE	SCORE
WWE 13	**225**	**5**
XCOM: Enemy Unknown	**224**	**9**



Thinking, planning, failing and dying is back in fashion: *XCOM* is a phenomenal reimagining of a classic title and an instant classic in its own right.

X-Men Destiny	**211**	**3**
X-Men Origins: Wolverine	179	7
Yaiba: Ninja Gaiden Z	**242**	**3**
Yakuza: Dead Souls	216	6
Yakuza 3	**191**	**8**
Yakuza 4	203	8
Yakuza 5*	**264**	**9**
Zen Pinball 2	224	9
Zone Of The Enders HD Collection	**226**	**8**

VITA



A-Men	217	7
Army Corps Of Hell	**217**	**6**
Assassin's Creed III: Liberation	225	7
Atelier Meruru: The Apprentice Of Arland	**221**	**3**
Everybody's Golf	215	8
BlazBlue: Continuum Shift Extend	**216**	**8**
Broken Age	257	5
Call Of Duty: Black Ops Declassified	**227**	**2**
Danganronpa: Trigger Happy Havoc	242	8
Danganronpa 2: Goodbye Despair	**249**	**9**
Dead Nation	201	8
Destiny Of Spirits	**244**	**7**
Dokuro	230	7
Earth Defense Force 2017 Portable	**230**	**8**
Escape Plan	216	8
FIFA Football	**216**	**8**
flOw	151	9
Flower	**176**	**8**
Gravity Crash	187	8
Gravity Rush	**219**	**9**
Hotline Miami	233	9
Hustle Kings	**216**	**8**
Joe Danger	194	9
Killzone: Mercenary	**236**	**9**
LittleBigPlanet	223	9
Little Deviants	**215**	**6**
Lumines Electric Symphony	216	8
Metal Gear Solid HD Collection	**221**	**7**
ModNation Racers: Road Trip	215	5
Mortal Kombat	**219**	**8**
MotorStorm RC	217	8
Muramasa Rebirth	**234**	**8**
New Little King's Story	224	7
Ninja Gaiden Sigma Plus	**217**	**7**
Ninja Gaiden Sigma 2 Plus	230	6
Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath HD	**214**	**8**
Orgarhythm	230	5
PlayStation All-Stars Battle Royale	**225**	**8**
Persona 4 Golden	228	9
PixelJunk Monsters	**163**	**9**
Puddle	222	8
Rayman Origins	**216**	**8**
Reality Fighters	215	5
Resistance: Burning Skies	**219**	**5**
Ridge Racer	216	4
Rocketbirds: Hardboiled Chicken	**212**	**8**
Silent Hill: Book Of Memories	225	3
Sorcery Saga: Curse of the Great Curry God	**240**	**7**
Soul Sacrifice	232	9
Sound Shapes	**223**	**8**
Superbeat Xonic	265	7
Superfrog HD	**234**	**4**
Super Monkey Ball: Banana Splitz	224	7
Sumioni: Demon Arts	**230**	**4**
Super Stardust Delta	216	8
Tearaway	**239**	**8**
Terraria	232	8
Touch My Katamari	**216**	**8**
Toukiden: The Age Of Demons	241	8
Ultimate Marvel vs Capcom 3	**216**	**8**
Uncharted: Fight For Fortune	227	8
Uncharted: Golden Abyss	**215**	**8**
Unit 13	216	6
Velocity Ultra	**233**	**8**
Virtua Tennis 4: World Tour Edition	215	8
Virtue's Last Reward	**227**	**8**
WipEout 2048	215	9

*denotes import review

WHAT WE'RE PLAYING...

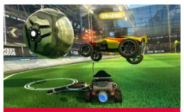
Watch out! Games!



WHAT
(have they been playing?)
Horizon: Zero Dawn
WHY (was it chosen?)
It's everything I hoped it would be

LUKE ALBIGÉS

I'VE BEEN FOLLOWING the steady progress of Guerrilla's epic open world adventure closely ever since it was first announced. On paper, it was everything I loved all rolled into one game – a splash of *Monster Hunter*, a dollop of *The Witcher*, robots, dinosaurs, and some essence of *Far Cry* for good measure. Not only is *Horizon* one of the best-looking games on PS4 (especially running on Pro in 4K – it's *incredible*), it's also right up there with *Bloodborne* and *Uncharted 4* as one of the best exclusives Sony has put out this generation. The world is awesome, its inhabitants interesting and varied, and the moment-to-moment combat just never gets old, as you leap, slide and dive around the robosaurs unleashing hell from Aloy's trusty bow. It also sets the scene for this becoming a series, a prospect I can't wait to see realised.



WHAT
(have they been playing?)
Rocket League
WHY (was it chosen?)
I've just realised I do actually like it

DREW SLEEP

THERE WAS A time when I couldn't look around this office without seeing someone enjoying a quick game of car-ball at lunchtimes or after work. But I just didn't get it – the game never clicked with me like it clearly did with others. I don't know what's changed, but going back to it, I see the error of my ways. It's really damn good, not least since it gives me another outlet to be toxic.


NEXT MONTH IN
PLAY
FFXIV: STORMBLOOD